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BUILDERS OF MODERN INDIA

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

The Prophet of Vedantic Socialism

V. K. R. V. RAO

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ABOUT THE SERIES

The object of this series is to record for the present and future generations, the story of the struggles and achievements of those eminent sons and daughters of India who have been mainly instrumental for our national renaissance and the attainment of independence. Except in a few cases, such authoritative biographies have not been available.

The biographies are planned as handy volumes written by knowledgeable persons and giving a brief account, in simple words, of the lives and activities of the eminent leaders and of their times. They are not intended either to be comprehensive studies or to replace the more elaborate biographies.

The work of writing these lives has to be entrusted to different persons. It has, therefore, not been possible to publish the biographies in a chronological order. It is hoped, however, that within a short period all eminent national personalities will figure in this series.

Shri R.R. Diwakar is the General Editor of the series.

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PREFACE

THIS LITTLE book ON the life and teachings of Swami Vivekananda is the fulfilment of a commitment I made to the Publications Division of the Government of India more than eight years back. The intervening years found me preoccupied with other activities, mainly the setting up of the Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bangalore. It was only after I had completed that work and retired from its directorship that I could find myself free to return to my old promise.

The book has no pretensions to historical research or original scholarship behind it. The account it gives of Vivekananda's life is based on the official biography that was compiled by his eastern and western disciples and draws on it literally in large measure. It is only when it attempts an assessment of his teachings, his personality, and his contribution to the building of modern India that I have ventured to obtrude my own amateurish understanding into the picture.

The book has four sections. The first, which is longest, deals with his life, the second with his teachings, the third with his personality, and the last with his contribution to the making of modern India. It is no more than an exercise in introducing Vivekananda to the youth of India, and cannot even remotely be considered as a substitute for what he has said or written himself nor even for the more exhaustive books that have been published on his life and teachings.

I am not a historian or a philosopher or a Sanskrit scholar. If nevertheless I had the temerity to accept the invitation to write a book on him in the series, "Builders of Modern India", I have

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done so, because I have been deeply influenced in my own life and the little work I may have done by the life and teachings of Swami Vivekananda. The auditorium in the Delhi School of Economics bears his name, while the one in the Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi, bears the name of his Master. It is my hope that the auditorium in the Institute for Social and Economic Change will bear the name of the man, who I think most embodied what Vivekananda taught, Mahatma Gandhi. Now as I enter on my seventieth year, I am attempting to complete my *guru-dakshina* by this little offering on his life and teachings.

I am indebted to Dr. R.R. Diwakar, Prof. B. Kuppuswamy, my wife Kamala and my daughter Meera Ramakrishnan for reading the manuscript and contributing more than editorial suggestions. They are not however responsible for its faults of omission and commission; these are solely due to my inability to do full justice to the heroic and many-sided facets of Vivekananda's towering personality.

I request forgiveness for my possible rashness in giving the sub-title "The Prophet of Vedantic Socialism". I have done so not merely on account of the influence he has had on my own socialist ideas but more on account of my strong conviction that socialism without spirituality is like salt without its savour or a motor without its fuel. It is only in Vivekananda that I found the answer to the socialist riddle; and I hope at least some readers of this book may also do so.

13th July 1978
'Dayanidhi', 26--A Main
IV 'T' Block, Jayanagar, Bangalore

V K R V Rao

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CONTENTS

Section I

The Life of Vivekananda

		Page
I.	Early Days	1
II.	The Quest	17
III.	Ramakrishna and Narendra	20
IV.	Narendra and His Fellow Disciples	47
V.	The Wandering Monk	52
VI.	Vivekananda Takes Vedanta Abroad	69
VII.	The Triumphal Return	102
VIII.	An Indian Summer in America	125
IX.	Last Days	131

Section II

The Teachings of Vivekananda

X.	Religion	141
XI.	Vedantic Socialism	165

Section III

Vivekananda—the Man

XII.	Vivekananda—The Man	203

Section IV

Vivekananda, a Builder of Modern India

XIII.	A Builder of Modern India	235
	Bibliography	253
	Glossary	255
	Index	261

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Section I

The Life of Vivekananda

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I

Early Days

TO UNDERSTAND and then appreciate the role which Vivekananda played in the remoulding of Indian life, one has to consider the state of Indian society at the time he came on the scene and the influence it must have exerted on the formative years of his life.

One important by-product of British rule on Indian society during the early years of the 19th century was the emergence of a new middle class in India. And this consisted of new groups of landholders, businessmen and intellectuals. While the business class was an adjunct of European business enterprise, that of landholders and intellectuals was due to the establishment of British administration and the introduction of western education. From the social point of view, this new middle class represented a separation of the economic from the purely social functions of the caste system. Living in close proximity with Europeans or seeing them daily and at close quarters also brought about changes in their style of living. Though small in number, they continued to grow and acquire an influence upon society out of all proportion to their numerical strength. This thrust upon society and its contribution to social change came primarily from the English-educated sections.

In the intellectual ferment that marked the earlier parts of this century, the introduction of English with the vast new body of

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thought that it opened up to the Indian intellectual, and the fierce and intemperate attacks made on Hindu religion, customs and traditions and Indian life in general by English missionaries were the two main factors. The former led to a rethinking on Hindu religious beliefs, customs and traditions, while the latter roused the national spirit and stimulated a defensive and protective attitude to Indian ideas and ways of living. There followed vigorous movements directed to both reformation and revivalism against the background of an attempt at imitation and adulation of western thinking and ways of living. As pointed out by Dr. Tarachand: "The epigram quoted by Abbe Dubois 'where every prospect pleaseth and man alone is vile' described succinctly the imperial attitude, which was almost universal among the British ruling class. Persons of different persuasions and professions, conservative, liberal, Christian, humanitarian, officials, merchants, politicians, members of the professional classes, in fact all sections of the British people, with some commendable exceptions, entertained views about the people of India, their religious and social customs, morals and culture, which ranged from patronisingly appreciative to grossly denunciatory." But the most clamorous detractors of Hinduism were the Christian missionaries and their allies, the Claphamites and the humanitarians. Charles Grant, who after retirement, became an influential member of the Court of Directors of the East India Company and a strong supporter of the Clapham sect, described the Hindu religion as "idolatory with all its rabble of impure deities, its monsters of wood and stone, its false principles and corrupt practices; its delusive hopes and fears, its ridiculous ceremonies and degrading superstitions, its lying legends and fraudulent impositions", while William Wilberforce, who led the anti-slavery movement in England, declared in Parliament: "our religion is sublime, pure, and beneficient. Theirs, is mean, licentious and cruel." Alexander Duff, who left a deep impression

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on missionary work in India, described the Indian people as a "multiple of heathens, the most licentious and depraved under the sun" and wrote in his book *India and Indian Missions*: "Of all the systems of false religion ever fabricated by the perverse ingenuity of fallen men, Hinduism is surely the most stupendous". There were, of course, notable exceptions to this wholesale chorus of condemnation, but they were drowned in the flood let loose by the missionaries "who preached and rubbed in their views in schools, societies and open markets and poured out incessant propaganda by means of books, pamphlets and the press."

No wonder that strong reaction of a nationalist character followed, especially on the part of middle class intellectuals, which however did not prevent them from learning the language of the rulers and the knowledge expressed in it. While almost all sections, which asserted their reaction to this onslaught on their religion and culture, were quite progressive in educational, economic and political matters, some took up a conservative attitude in matters of religion, others a liberal and reformist attitude, while yet others revolted against the past and broke away from its shackles. An illustrious example of the conservative school was Radha Kanta Deb, who was one of the founders of the Hindu College and at the helm of its affairs for over 30 years from 1817 to 1850. He opened a Sanskrit College in 1851 and the Hindu Metropolitan College in 1853 after he had resigned from the Managing Committee of the Hindu College on account of differences with its English Chairman. He was however a conservative Hindu and fought hard against the conversions that were taking place to Christianity from Hinduism.

Then there was a group of radical young men moulded by their brilliant professor of English, Henry Derozia, who started journals like *Parthenon* and the *Bengal Spectator*, which became the mouth-piece of the group known as "New Bengal". These journals were

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outspoken in their criticism of Hindu religion and social customs. The spirit of inquiry and free thinking generated by the times led to some spectacular protests against orthodoxy by young men flouting taboos against eating and drinking while some went to the length of repudiating Hinduism itself and indeed all religions.

Between the two extremes of revived orthodoxy and radical revolt against Hinduism, there was a middle path initiated by Raja Rammohun Roy, a great linguist and a profound student not only of the Hindu religion but also of the Christian and Islamic faiths. He brought logic and ratiocination to the examination of religious dogmas, rituals and customs and went back to the pristine purity of the foundations of all faiths. While he believed in the truth of all great religions and drew from them in formulating his own views, his basic interest lay in the resuscitation of the pure religion of the Hindus. He denounced irrational customs, modes of worship, rites and ceremonies including idolatory as inconsistent with the *Upanishads*, and asked the Hindus to reaffirm the old creed of the unity of God as taught in Vedic literature to replace the rituals which had lost their original meaning, and to resume the ancient ways of disciplining the mind to gain mastery over evil passions and selfish impulses. To ensure permanency for his religious and social reforms, he established the Brahmo Samaj in 1828 for the worship of the Eternal, Inscrutable and Immutable Being proclaimed as the Creator of the Universe in the ancient Hindu scriptures. He banned from such places of worship the installation of images, statues or sculptures purporting to depict God, or sacrifices of any kind of life, or eating and drinking, or reviling of other religions.

The severely intellectual character of its tenets and mode of worship of the Brahmo Samaj attracted the highly-educated members of the Bengal elite and exerted a profound influence on middle class thinking though not by way of large numbers in adherents.

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With his departure for England and subsequent death there in 1833, the Samaj lost some of its prestige and missionary zeal. The entry of Debendranath Tagore and Keshab Chandra Sen gave it a new life, spreading it outside Calcutta and beyond Bengal. A new journal was established called *Tattva Boddhini Patrika* under the editorship of Akshay Kumar Datta. This only led the Christian missionaries led by Alexander Duff to redouble their efforts to denigrate Hinduism and obtain converts to Christianity. There followed another split in the Brahmo Samaj, the older version continuing under the name of Adi Brahmo Samaj while the new version was institutionalised by Keshab Chandra Sen under the name of Bharatvarshiya Brahmo Samaj or the Brahmo Samaj of India. While Debendranath Tagore moved further towards an intellectual attitude to religion by denying the infallibility of the *Vedas* and relied on "the human work illuminated by spiritual knowledge born of self-realisation", Keshab Chandra Sen, profoundly influenced by Christian ideals and the personality of Jesus Christ, moved away from Hinduism altogether to establish the Brahmo religion on a universal basis gleaned from the teachings of all religions. Later, he came under the spell of Vaishnavite devotional practices, the standing evidence of God-intoxication in Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, and the Hindu concept of *avatars* which led him to add revelation as a source of religion, besides nature and intuition. His growing mysticism roused opposition; and when his reforming zeal was denied in practice by the marriage of his daughter to the young Maharaja of Cooch-Behar in accordance with Hindu and not Brahmo rites in 1878, there occurred another split which led to the emergence of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj with its members also taking a prominent part in patriotic political movements. Keshab Chandra now set up a new mission called the Nava Vidhan which attempted to combine Christian and Hindu ideals and practices with a strong emphasis on the mystic aspects of religion.

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The period was also marked by Hindu revivalist trends under the influence of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and his identification of the old *sanyasin* order with the new patriotic urges for liberation from foreign rule and influences. Another notable figure of great influence, though not working in the religious field, was Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar who, in spite of (may be because of) his background and profound scholarship in Sanskrit, proved himself a great social reformer. He fought against polygamy, child-marriage and prohibition of widow remarriage, and sought modernisation by introducing English in the Sanskrit College of which he was Principal so that the traditional *Vedanta* and *Sankhya* philosophies could get the impact of the modern and rational trends contained in the English writings of western philosophers. At about the same time, Bengal was being stirred to its depths by an illiterate and traditional priest from the Dakshineshwar Kali Temple, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, whose austere life, patent sincerity and profound exposition of the basic tenets of Hindu faith were drawing some of the most sophisticated and brilliant intellectuals of Calcutta to hear him. His universally-acknowledged mystic experiences singled him out from all other religious men of his time as a practitioner of God-realisation, while his tolerance of all faiths and complete self-realisation by renunciation of ego, accompanied by love and compassion for all humanity, placed him in the forefront of the modernising religious reformers.

Thus, the larger part of the 19th century, which witnessed the profound impact of Western thought, Christian missions and the consolidation of British political domination on Indian life and Hindu religion, led to a renewal of the emotional link with the country's religious past and emergence of a fierce pride in the national heritage, and an active concern with reforms in all walks of Indian life and thinking. The intellectual and reasoned approach to religion represented by Raja Rammohun Roy and Debendranath

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Tagore, the emotionalism and mysticism imparted by Keshab Chandra Sen, the new social radicalism contributed by the Saddharan Brahmo Samaj and the Phule-Karve-Ranade contributions in Maharashtra, the revivalism and patriotism set off by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and the Arya Samaj in the Punjab and the the simple but profound indentification of religion with realisation, sacrifice, and universal love not only preached but also practised by Sri Ramakrishna—all left a deep though a complex and conflicting impression on the Bengali mind of the middle of 19th century. This combination of reforming zeal, militant patriotism and defensive pride in India's religious and cultural heritage was to attend the growth of the national movement in India during the entire 19th century. It was in this environment of the compendium of religion, reform and patriotism that Vivekananda was born and brought up.

It must be added that this was also the period of India's economic impoverishment, the decline and pauperisation of Indian artisans and craftsmen, and the proletarianisation of India's peasantry. Famines were a recurring feature of the period and took heavy toll of human lives. Poverty became a much more conspicuous feature of Indian life and was connected with the effects of British rule in India. The mounting pressure of poverty naturally made its impression on sensitive and patriotic Indians of the new English educated class, who were now becoming more political in their outlook and found economic reasons, besides national pride, in seeking the liberation of their country from foreign rule. This ubiquitous poverty was to leave a profound impression on Vivekananda who was the first person to coin the expression *daridra-narayan* and see the worship of God in the service of the poor.

Narendra Nath, or Swami Vivekananda as he became known to the world later, was born in Calcutta on Monday, January 12, 1863. His great grand-father, Ram Mohan Datta, started life as an associate and managing clerk of an English solicitor during the early

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days of the East India Company in Bengal and had amassed a large fortune in the exercise of his profession and lived in comfort. The mansion which he built in Gour Mohan Mukherjee Lane still stands as a reminder of the great patriot monk who was born in that family. Narendra's grand-father, Durga Charan Datta, however did not follow in his father's foot-steps. Though well versed in Persian and Sanskrit and skilled in his father's profession of law, he chose to renounce the world and became a monk at the age of 25 soon after the birth of his son, Viswanath. He never returned to the family. Perhaps this was a pointer to coming events which were to see his grandson embracing monkhood at about the same age but as a bachelor. Durga Charan Datta's son Viswanath, the father of Narendra, was brought up by his mother and his uncle in that large mansion which had been built by his grand-father. Viswanath showed no monastic inclination like his father, took to the legal profession of his grand-father, and built up a good practice as an Attorney-at-Law in the High Court of Calcutta. Obviously influenced by the spirit of his times, Viswanath was no tradition-bound orthodox Hindu. He was well-read in western literature. His culture was catholic, he had studied the Bible and delighted in reciting from the Persian poet Hafiz. It was he who gave his son Narendra an interest in western knowledge and the culture of other lands, and encouraged open-mindedness, a questioning spirit, and uprightness and manliness in conduct. Viswanath was a great lover of music, had a good voice himself, and, recognising his son Naren's musical talent, had him trained in both vocal and instrumental music from two well-known musicians, Ahmed Khan and Bani Gupta. While his earnings were large and Naren was brought up in affluence, Viswanath, who was known for his charity, liberal outlook and sympathy for the afflicted spent his fortune recklessly without regard to the morrow or the financial future of his family. This was to tell on Naren's life when Viswanath died suddenly at a comparatively young age, just when Naren had appeared for his

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B.A. examination. Viswanath's wife was a traditional Hindu lady who kept religion alive in the house and gave her son a grounding in traditional Hindu culture by telling him stories from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Naren thus grew up in a home marked both by tradition and modernity. And, later it became a vital part of his mission in life to effect a marriage between the two.

Naren's boyhood was largely like that of any high-spirited, vigorous, and healthy young boy, who liked being leader among his playmates, loved pranks, and displayed immense curiosity in watching the world around him. He had a great zest for life, enjoyed organising dramas, gymnastics and magic lantern shows, and was constantly out seeing interesting places in Calcutta, sometimes a garden, sometimes the Museum and sometimes the Ochterlony Monument. Unlike other boys of his age, however, he was interested in meditation, and it was not just play acting for he would get so absorbed as to lose himself in concentration. A story told of him gives authentic proof of this trait. He induced some of his playmates to join him at playing at meditation. Once when he was meditating with his playmates a cobra appeared. His companions got frightened and ran away after shouting a warning to Naren. Naren evidently did not hear them and remained where he was. Fortunately no damage was done as the snake glided away after staying a while. In response to his parents' enquiries as to why he did not run away, Naren is reported to have said: "I knew nothing of the snake or anything else. I was experiencing inexpressible bliss." Whether he was experiencing inexpressible bliss or not, there was no doubt that he was in a state of intense concentration and not alive to what was happening around him. It was this capacity to concentrate that gave him his prodigious memory and his capacity for reading and then remembering hundreds of pages of a book in less time than it would take a normal man to read a few of those pages. This obviously inborn trait was

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recognised by Narendra himself. Illustrative of this are two quotations I give below from his own words :

"Just two or three days before the Entrance Examination I found that I hardly knew anything of Geometry. Then I began to study the subject, keeping awake for the whole night; and in the course of 24 hours I mastered the four books of Geometry." "It so happened that I could understand an author without reading his book line by line. I could get the meaning by just reading the first and the last line of a paragraph. As this power developed I found it unnecessary to read even the paragraphs. I could follow by reading only the first and last lines of a page. Further, where the author introduced discussions to explain a matter and it took him four or five or even more pages to clear the subject, I could grasp the whole trend of his argument by only reading the first few lines."

No wonder, that talking on education in his later life, he dwelt on the importance of training the mind rather than stuffing it with knowledge. The success of Maharshi Mahesh Yogi's attempt at the nurturing of creative intelligence on the basis of meditation, more correctly, concentration, is a current illustration of the Vivekananda thesis of the power that concentration gives to the growth of mental power.

This penchant for concentration that Naren developed from his early years had behind it a spiritual urge rather than a desire to strengthen his personal prowess. He used it as a major instrument for establishing cognitive contact with the unknown and the unknowable, the Universal Reality of the *Upanishads* and the sweet presence of his Master's Goddess of Dakshineshwar, Mother Kali, conversation with whom was a matter of daily occurrence for Sri Ramakrishna. Narendra pondered deeply on the idea of God; and concentration became a habit with him. His intuitive faculty was developing; and temporary glimpses of Reality with its feeling

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of exaltation became almost daily happenings with him. Playing at meditation turned to real and prolonged exercises in meditation; and he found it difficult to restrain himself, even when he knew he had to in the interest of the work he was bent on carrying out in this world. There seems no doubt that the seer, the visionary and the monk were all latent in young Narendra, even if one's reasoning may not accept the thesis that Narendra was a *Dhyana-Siddha*—an adept in meditation from his very birth, or the belief that he was one of the seven sages who came down from heaven in order to fulfil the mission that Ramakrishna had set for himself when he took human form.

Narendra showed his preference for a monastic life almost from his childhood days. Whenever a *sadhu* came to the door, he was delighted and would give him whatever he had as alms. This led to his being locked up in a room whenever a monk appeared, but that did not prevent him from throwing out of the window anything the room contained as an offering to the monk. May be he was influenced by the childhood stories he had heard of his grandfather having embraced monkhood at an early age and the nervousness that his mother displayed at his delight in the presence of monks. Naren would sometimes tell his friends that he would become a *sanyasi* because a palmist who saw his hand had made such a prediction. But this feeling for monkhood, or a life of renunciation of worldly goods and temptations was in fact, part of his innermost being. Thus, the morning before his B.A. examination, he stood outside a college-mate's room singing of the glory of God and paid no heed when a friend intervened to remind him of the examination. However he appeared for the examination and as we know, got his degree. But when he was preparing for the B.L. examination, he abruptly rose from his study and told a friend: "I must abandon the idea of appearing for the examination. What does it all mean? I must be free." And he did not appear for the examination. One is reminded of the reply given by Sri Rama-

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krishna in response to his brother's persuasion to join a modern school: "Brother, what shall I do with a mere bread-winning education. I would rather acquire that wisdom which will illuminate my heart and getting which one is satisfied for ever." Whether destined or not, his natural inclinations were in the direction of *sanyas* and renunciation of the worldly life to which ordinary mortals are so strongly attached. No wonder that he resisted the several attempts which his father made to get him married; and when the last one became almost irresistible with the offer of an alliance with a powerful and wealthy family of Calcutta who were prepared to pay a magnificent dowry and send him to England for higher education, his father died and Naren became free to make his own decision. To all subsequent attempts by members of his family to persuade him to marry and lead a normal householder's life, he would say: "What, are you going to drown me? Once married it will be all over with me."

While Naren was strongly inclined from the beginning towards the development of the spiritual side of his life, he was no naive believer nor an unquestioning victim of the imperious dicta of holy authority. He was a great believer in reason; and from his early days he sought to press the test of verification and reality on all the dogmas or dicta which, he was told, were based on infallible authority. While his attempt to question was perhaps not uncommon and in fact rather in tune with the spirit of his times, his passion for verification and testing of truth by conformity to reality was uncommon and revealed a scientific temper and attitude with which perhaps his mind had been charged even from boyhood. A few incidents from his early life can be cited to illustrate his scientific attitude. As a young boy, he saw Hindus of many castes and some Muslims coming to his house to see and talk with his father and there would be much smoking of the hookah with a sharing of each other's hookah. But he noticed that each caste confined

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itself to its own hookah and so also the Muslims. Being told that otherwise caste would be broken and bring untold calamities in its wake, he decided to test this obviously irrational thesis. Accordingly, he went round the room, taking a whiff from every one's hookah, including the Mohammadan's; and nothing happened. When reprimanded, he coolly answered : "I cannot see what difference it makes". If only his elders had similar sense, there would have been no "Hindu" water and no "Muslim" water and all that it ultimately led to in the final partitioning of the country. In an earlier incident, the old grand-father of a neighbouring house, who was upset by Naren using the trees of his compound not only for climbing but also for swinging and somersaulting and creating an unholy din, tried to stop it by telling Naren that the tree was haunted by the ghost of an uninitiated *Brahmin* that would break the neck of those who climbed the tree. A friend also heard this and, taking it seriously, asked Naren to desist. But Naren only laughed and said: "What an ass you are. Why, my neck should have been broken long before this if the old grand-father's ghost story was true." What he said then was perhaps a forerunner of what he was to say later to large audiences: "Do not believe a thing because you read it in a book. Do not believe a thing because another has said it is so. Find out the truth for yourself. That is realisation."

Narendra was sent to a *pathashala* at the age of six but his parents withdrew him from that primary school on account of the disconcerting vocabulary he acquired there from his fellow-pupils. A private tutor was engaged and Naren showed remarkable progress in his studies. At the age of eight, he was admitted to the Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's Metropolitan Institution and became known for his exceptional intelligence as also inexhaustible energy and restlessness. New games interested him and so did toy railways and all sorts of machinery. It is interesting to recall that

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he showed initial aversion to learning English, but when the teachers insisted and his parents supported them, he gave in and then astonished everyone by the ease with which he learnt it. An incident narrated about his school life gives remarkable testimony to the fearless way in which he stuck to the telling of truth. One day, when Naren and his friends were talking among themselves during a class lecture, the teacher suddenly turned round to ask them to repeat what he had been saying. Naren, who could both talk and listen at the same time, answered correctly all the questions put by the teacher, while the others could not. They were all asked to stand up as punishment, but the teacher excluded Naren in spite of being told that it was he who was doing all the talking during the lesson. But Naren stood up of his own accord; and when the teacher told him that he did not have to, replied : "But I must, for it was I who was doing the talking". This spirit of truthfulness and sense of justice remained with him all through his life and was a part of his personality.

His father left Calcutta for Raipur in the Central Province in 1877 while Naren was a student of the third class and returned to Calcutta only in 1879. Though he had been absent from school for two years, Naren was readmitted and, completing three years work in one year, passed the Entrance Examination in the first division. Thus, at the age of 16, Naren became qualified to take up collegiate education.

Naren joined the Presidency College but left it after a year to join the General Assembly's Institution founded by the Scottish Mission Board, subsequently known as the Scottish Church College. He passed the First Arts Examination in 1881 securing a second class. It was when he was studying in the First Arts class that he heard of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa of which more will be said later. Naren passed the B.A. examination in 1884 and was admitted to the Law College. He did not complete his law course. His destiny lay in a different direction from that of the profession his

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father had followed.

While Naren did not secure academic distinctions during his collegiate career and could have been dismissed as an ordinary student by examination standards, he was nevertheless an outstanding figure among his fellow students. This was how a distinguished college contemporary of Naren described him. "When I first met Vivekananda in 1881", writes Brijendranath Seal (an eminent philosopher and Vice Chancellor of Mysore University), in the *Prabuddha Bharata* of 1907, "we were fellow students of Principal William Hastie, scholar, metaphysician, and poet, at the General Assembly's College. He was my senior in age, though I was his senior in the College by one year. Undeniably a gifted youth, sociable, free and unconventional in manners, a sweet singer, the soul of social circles, a brilliant conversationalist, somewhat bitter and caustic, piercing with the shafts of a keen wit the shows and mummeries of the world, sitting in the scorner's chair but hiding the tenderest of hearts under that garb of cynicisim; altogether an inspired Bohemian but possessing what Bohemians lack, an iron will; somewhat peremptory and absolute, speaking with accents of authority and withal possessing a strange power of the eye which could hold his listeners in thrall."

Apart from his first meeting with Sri Ramakrishna in 1881 which was followed by many more meetings during the next three years of his college life, Naren utilised this period to acquire a degree of western knowledge that set him far above the level of other students and gave him the intellectual foundations which stood him in such good stead when he went on his conquering pilgrimage of the western hemisphere. Thus, he had mastered western logic, western philosophy, and ancient and modern history of different European nations even during the first two years of his collegiate career. Herbert Spencer, Kant, Schopenhauer, Auguste Comte and John Stuart Mill with his *Three Essays On Religion*, and Hume all came within his reading spree, giving him the scepticism towards authority and

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the faith in pure reason which enabled him in later years to meet western thinkers on their own ground when he began introducing them to the treasures of the *Vedanta*. His interest was however not confined only to philosophy. He took a course in western medicine to know the working of the nervous system and the link between the brain and spinal cord so basic to the understanding of Yoga and later to prove so helpful in his exposition of the subject to his western disciples. Poetry also attracted him and especially Shelley, whose "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" moved him with its picture of a spiritual principle of unity as no philosopher of universalism had succeeded in doing. Wordsworth with his experienced visions of ecstasy was of course the great star of his poetic firmament. Did not Principal Hastie tell him that the vision which Wordsworth experienced and expressed in his "Excursion" could actually be seen and felt if one went to Dakshineshwar and met Sri Ramakrishna? And did that not ultimately lead to his experiencing himself the ultimate and unseen Reality? Poetry did more to make God real to him and Universal Reality realisable than all the arguments and reasonings of both western and eastern philosophers. No wonder therefore that poetry appealed so much to Naren who was striving to reach beyond reason and logic to get a glimpse of the Universal Reality, for the apprehension of which he was in constant quest. Altogether, Naren's collegiate education and the world of thought and emotion with which he came into contact during that period was a necessary step in the spiritual evolution that was to make him the most outstanding preacher of Vedantic Philosophy in the English language.

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II

The Quest

WE HAVE already seen that even from his childhood, young Naren showed signs of spiritual interest and was fascinated by meditation and the idea of renunciation. His biographers relate an incident in his life when he was 14 and on his way to Raipur with his father. Travelling in a bullock cart over the Vindhya range where the lofty hills on either side of the road almost met and the verdant trees and creepers laden with flowers looked joyous with the warbling of birds of variegated colours, his eyes suddenly fell on a large hive of bees in a cleft in one of the hills. Filled with wonder at the majesty and power of the Divine Providence, he lay in the bullock cart lost to all outward consciousness and found that a considerable distance had been covered by the time he returned to a normal state. His biographers, commenting on this incident remark: "Perhaps this was the first time that his powerful imagination helped him to ascend into the realm of the unknown, oblivious of the entire world."

Naren was always anxious to experience what others would have been satisfied with hearing or reading about. When even young, rapt in listening to the thrilling tales of Rama's life and how Hanuman lived in banana groves, young Naren went to a banana grove instead of returning home and spent some hours of the night there waiting to get a glimpse of the monkey god. He was never satisfied with hearsay or authority or even intellectual reasoning. As a

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college student, he came under the influence of the Brahmo Samaj and its protest against certain features of orthodox Hinduism such as polytheism, image worship, divine incarnation, and the need of a *guru*, offering in its place a monotheistic religion without an intermediary. The movement also espoused progressive social reforms such as the break-up of the caste system, recognition of the equality of man, education and emancipation of women, and raising of the age of marriage. All this fitted in with Naren's own impulsive and intellectual reactions to what he was seeing round him in the life of the Hindus and he found in the Samaj a way of preserving his pride in the past without being subject to its frailties. He came to regard it as an ideal institution for solving all of life's problems, both individual and national, attended many of its meetings and became one of the original members of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, a splinter group formed by Pandit Shiva Nath Shastri and Vijay Krishna Goswami. But he was not satisfied.

After reading Mill's *Three Essays On Religion*, he lost his boyish enthusiasm for the theism that he had imbibed from the Brahmo Samaj, and his zest for the old prayerful devotion , and became filled with doubts about the ultimate Reality. He asked his college colleague, Brijendranath Seal, for a course in theistic philosophic reading that would perhaps set his doubts at rest. Seal spoke to him of the unity of the *Para Brahman* as the Universal Reason and the deliverance of the world from unreason through equality, liberty, and fraternity. For some time, Naren was satisfied with the idea of the sovereignty of Universal Reason and negation of the individual as the basic principles of an ethical order and overcame his scepticism. But it did not release him from material longings or the yearnings and susceptibilities of his artistic nature or Bohemian temperament. He found no peace in the sovereignty of pure reason and longed for some power which would deliver him from this earthly bondage. His senses were not satisfied with a

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pale, bloodless philosophy that lacked visible reality in form and glory, and cried out aloud for a power outside himself, a *guru* or master, who, by embodying perfection in the flesh, would still the commotion in his soul.

He was not satisfied with an abstraction called God. He wanted to feel His presence and bask in His glory. He tried diverse teachers, creeds and cults to get satisfaction and found his efforts fruitless. At last he went to the doyen of the Samaj, the Venerable Maharshi Debendranath Tagore who was living in retirement in a boat on the Ganga, bursting on him with the strange question, "Sir, have you seen God?" The only answer he got was "My boy, you have the yogi's eyes". Perhaps the Maharshi meant that Naren had yogic power and would therefore see God himself, but the young man came away disappointed. It seemed to him that the Maharshi had not seen God nor could he find any other leader of various religious sects whom he met who could say they had seen God. Was his quest for God therefore to be in vain or was God only an idea without reality? It was then that he remembered the old man Ramakrishna whom he had first met in the house of Surendra Nath Mitra in November 1881 and who had invited him to Dakshineshwar. He also recalled what Principal Hastie had told him about Ramakrishna actually experiencing the spiritual ecstasy and vision of Universal Reality that Wordsworth had described in his poem "Excursion". So he decided to go to Dakshineshwar along with Surendra Nath and ask Ramakrishna the same question he had put to Debendranath Tagore. With this decision, Naren had taken the first step in his quest for God, which was ultimately to transform him into Swami Vivekananda.

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III

Ramakrishna and Narendra

By the time Narendra had his first meeting with Sri Ramakrishna at the Dakshineshwar temple, Sri Ramakrishna had already become a celebrated figure in the middle class circles in Calcutta who were interested in religion and were seeking a reconciliation of their pride in the Indian heritage with the doubts and questionings induced by western education and influence. *Pujari* at the Kali temple, Sri Ramakrishna had led a very strenuous life of penance and austerities and had reached a state of God-consciousness that was practically constant and led him almost daily into trances and *Samadhi*, reviving traditional beliefs in the possibility of realisation mentioned in sacred books but not actually seen so vividly and visibly in practice. More importantly and what led to the flocking of middle class intellectuals and seekers after religious truth to his presence were the discourses he gave, not so much as lectures but as conversation, simple, direct, and driving home profound truths by the use of easily understood parables and stories. But Sri Ramakrishna was not satisfied with the crowds that he drew to his residence in the temple. He had actually realised and experienced the Vedantic truths that had got vulgarised and obscured over time and been replaced by customs, rituals and superstitions that had nothing to do with God or Vedantic religion. He wanted young men to whom he could impart not

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only knowledge but also his experience and who could act as his messengers for spreading the truth as he had actually known and realised it in his personal life. He literally burned with this desire. As he said of this state later: "There was no limit to the yearning I had then. The secular talks of the worldly-minded were galling to me and I would look wistfully to the day when my beloved companions would come. I hoped to find solace in conversing with them and unburdening my mind by telling them about my realisations. When during the evening service the temple premises rang with the sound of bells and conch-shells, I would climb to the roof of the building, and writhing in anguish of heart cry at the top of my voice: Come, my boys! Oh, where are you all? I cannot bear to live without you." Many came to see him and hear him, poets and thinkers, preachers and theologians, professors and leaders of public opinion, and devotees, both rich and poor. But Sri Ramakrishna was waiting for his pre-ordained disciples. And among them he knew would be one who would be foremost not only in understanding him but in being one with him and functioning as leader in transmitting his zeal and ideas and spreading his message. It was a long wait and he was impatient.

Then in answer to his yearning and the fulfilment of his life work, Narendra appeared at Dakshineshwar with his mind unsettled and full of questions, sceptical but also hopeful, and yearning to find the truth with an impatience that matched that of the Master for finding some one to whom he could impart the truth.

An account of Naren's first meeting with Sri Ramakrishna is available from both the *guru* and the disciple. Sri Ramakrishna said of this meeting: "He seemed careless of his body and dress and unmindful of the external world. His eyes bespoke an introspective mind as if some part of it were always concentrated upon something within. I was surprised to find such a spiritual soul coming from the material atmosphere of Calcutta." Naren Sang

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a few Bengali songs at his request which made Sri Ramakrishna lose control of himself and fall into an ecstatic mood. After he left the Master was seized with an agonising desire to see him again. To quote his own words: "I felt as if my heart was being squeezed like a wet towel. I ran to the northern part of the garden and cried at the top of my voice: 'O my darling, come to me. I cannot live without seeing you." After some time I felt better. This state of things continued for six months. There were other boys who also came here. I felt greatly drawn towards some of them, but nothing like the way I was attracted to Naren."

Naren's account was more graphic and included details that were not told by Sri Ramakrishna. "Well I sang the song. Shortly after, he suddenly rose and taking me by the hand led me to the northern verandah shutting the door behind him. It was locked from the outside; so we were alone. I thought he would give me some private instructions. But to my utter surprise he began to shed profuse tears of joy as he held my hand, and, addressing me most tenderly as one long familiar to him, said: 'Ah you came so late. How could you be so unkind as to keep me waiting so long? My ears are well nigh burnt in listening to the profane talks of worldly people. Oh how I yearn to unburden my mind to some one who can appreciate my innermost experience!' Thus he went on amidst sobs. The next moment he stood before me with folded hands and began to address me, 'Lord, I know you are that ancient sage, Nara—the incarnation of Narayana—born on earth to remove the miseries of mankind' and so on."

Naren was naturally taken aback. He thought that the man he had come to meet must be stark mad. And then the madman, bringing sweets from his room, fed him with his own hands and said, "Promise that you will come alone to me at an early date." At his importunity he had to say "yes" and returned to his friends.

The strange words and stranger conduct of Sri Ramakrishna

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left Naren with conflicting thoughts. Observing him carefully he could not see anything betokening a madman in his words, movements or behaviour towards others. He seemed to be a man of genuine renunciation whose words and life seemed mutually consistent. He felt emboldened therefore to ask him the same question he had asked without success of so many other holy men. "Have you seen God, Sir?" To his utter surprise came the answer: "Yes, I see Him just as I see you here, only in a much more intense sense." He went on: "God can be realised, one can see and talk to Him as I am doing with you. But who cares to do so? People shed torrents of tears for their wives and children, for wealth or property, but who does so for the sake of God? If one weeps sincerely for Him. He surely manifests Himself." Naren was impressed. He had at last found a man who could say it, not like an ordinary preacher but from the depths of his own realisation. He was obviously a saint but he also appeared to be a madman. Impressed but also perplexed as he was, Naren did not find it possible, because of his other preoccupations, to return to him soon and resolve the mystery.

His second visit came a month later and proved even more devastating in its results. This time Sri Ramakrishna after making him sit beside him on his bed slowly drew nearer and then suddenly placed his right foot on Naren's body. The touch was devastating in its effect on his individuality. With his eyes open, Naren saw the walls and everything in the room whirling rapidly and vanishing into nothingness, the whole universe together with his individuality about to merge in an all encompassing mysterious void. Frightened and unable to control himself he cried out, "What is it that you are doing to me? I have my parents at home." Naren was obviously not yet prepared for accepting the *Advaita* truth. Sri Ramakrishna laughed aloud at Naren's cry and stroking his chest said, "All right let it rest now. Everything will come in time"

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As soon as he said this, normality returned to Naren and he found everything within and without the room as it had been before. The experience was repeated when Naren paid his third visit to Dakshineshwar. This time the Master took him to the adjacent garden of Jadunath Mallick for a stroll and then sat down in the parlour. Soon Sri Ramakrishna fell into a trance and touched Narendra. Though fully determined not to let any touch of the Master affect him as it had done the last time, Naren found himself totally overwhelmed and again lost all outward consciousness. When he came to himself after a while, he found the Master stroking his chest. What had happened in between he did not know. It was obvious to Naren that these were not any displays of mesmerism or hypnotism. And yet how could a madman effect this strange experience in him? May be he was an incarnation of God but Naren's rationalistic mind could not accept this either. So the mystery remained unresolved and Naren went home, puzzled but happy at the love and affection that was being showered on him by the old man. In fact it was Sri Ramakrishna's love for him that drew Naren to him like a magnet rather than the strange experiences that actually constituted an onslaught on his reason.

Sri Ramakrishna went on weaving the web of love which was drawing Naren nearer and nearer to him. If Naren failed to come to Dakshineshwar for a few days, he would get disturbed and weep and pray to the Divine Mother to make him come. And he would tell others who came to see him to go to Naren and ask him to come to Dakshineshwar. Meanwhile he lost no chance of talking about Naren and praising him not only in his absence but also in his presence. In fact he embarrassed Naren one day very much when after Keshab Chandra Sen, Vijay Krishna Goswami and other well-known Brahmo Samaj leaders who were seated in his room had left, he turned round to some of his devotees and said, "Well, if Keshab is possessed of one mark of greatness which has made him famous,

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Naren has 18 such marks. In Keshab and Vijay I saw the light of knowledge burning like a candle flame, but in Narendra it was like a blazing sun, dispelling the last vestige of ignorance and delusion." When Naren protested and asked him not to say such things again Sri Ramakrishna replied: "I cannot help it. The Divine Mother showed me certain things which I simply repeated. And she never reveals to me anything but the truth." Naren was not impressed by this authorisation from the divine and retorted that it was more likely to be fancy and imagination on the Master's part, particularly when there was a personal predisposition on the part of the visionary in his favour. Perplexed at Naren's logic and display of western scientific psychology Sri Ramakrishna, child-like as he was, appealed to the Divine Mother and was reassured when She told him, "Why do you care for what he says? In a few days he will admit every word is true." Sri Ramakrishna also brought in the Mother when any one disparaged Naren during his absence and would say, "That is not true. Mother has told me that Naren can never fall into evil ways." Another time when Naren rebuked him for showing so much love and personal preference for him, the Master became nervous and dejected and went to the Kali temple to seek reassurance from the Divine Mother. Returning a few minutes later, he told Naren: "You rogue, I will not listen to you any more. Mother says I love you because I see the Lord in you, and the day I shall no longer do so, I shall not be able to bear even the sight of you."

While Naren was thus being showered with love and given special and favoured attention by Sri Ramakrishna and was also reciprocating the affection he was receiving, he was proving a tough customer as far as accepting the Master's ideas were concerned. Naren was of course convinced of the Master's utter sincerity and greatly admired his renunciation and was deeply touched by his child-like simplicity. But he was not prepared to accept his Vedantic

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tenet of one Universal Reality which alone was real and which existed not only in every human being but also in everything else around him. Narendra saw no difference between such philosophy and atheism and thought there could be no greater sin than to think of oneself as identical with the Creator. He would tell Sri Ramakrishna : "I am God, You are God, these created things are God—what can be more absurd than this. The sages who wrote such things must have been insane." Sri Ramakrishna would only be amused and say, "why limit God's infinitude? Go on praying to the God of truth and believe in any aspect of His which He reveals to you." But Naren would not give in. Sri Ramakrishna's belief did not fit in with what he considered as reason, and nothing inconsistent with reason could be true. When Sri Ramakrishna found that his arguments failed to convince the man whom he had chosen to be his principal missionary, he knew that the only argument that would convince Naren would be experience. In fact, it was experience or realisation that had led the *Upanishadic* seers to proclaim the Vedantic creed as truth and it was also experience that had made his own self such a convinced *Advaitin*. One day when Naren had left after another futile argument about the identity of the individual soul with *Brahman*, he heard Naren telling Hazra: "How can this be? This jug is God, this cup is God and we too are God. Nothing can be more preposterous." Sri Ramakrishna, hearing Naren's loud laughter after this remark, came out of his room smiling, touched Narendra, and immediately fell into *Samadhi*. The effect of Sri Ramakrishna's touch on Narendra is best described in his own words: "The magic touch of the Master that day immediately brought a wonderful change over my mind. I was stupefied to find that really there was nothing in the universe but God. I saw it quite clearly but kept silent, to see if the idea would last. But the impression did not abate in the course of the day. I returned home, but there too, everything I saw appeared to be *Brahman*.

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I sat down to take my meal, but found that everything—the food, the plate, the person who served and even myself—was nothing but That. I ate a morsel or two and sat still. I was startled by my mother's words, 'Why do you sit still? Finish your meal' and began to eat again. But all the while, whether eating or lying down, or going to college, I had the same experience and felt myself always in a sort of comatose state. While walking in the streets, I noticed cabs plying but I did not feel inclined to move out of the way. I felt that the cabs and myself were of one stuff. There was no sensation in my limbs, which, I thought, were getting paralysed. I did not relish eating, and felt as if somebody else were eating. Sometimes I lay down during a meal and after a few minutes got up and again began to eat. The result would be that on some days I would take too much, but it did no harm. My mother became alarmed and said that there must be something wrong with me. She was afraid that I might not live long. When the above state altered a little, the world began to appear to me as a dream. While walking in Cornwallis Square, I would strike my head against the iron railings to see if they were real or only a dream. This state of things continued for some days. When I became normal again, I realised that I must have had a glimpse of the *Advaita* state. Then it struck me that the words of the scriptures were not false. Thenceforth I could not deny the conclusions of the *Advaita* philosophy."

Naren's other great bone of contention with his Master was the latter's worship of Kali as the Divine Mother and continuously quoting Her as if he was actually seeing Her every day and conversing with Her. Naren constantly argued with Sri Ramakrishna against image worship. Tired of trying to convince him that the images worshipped were but presentment of spiritual ideals, Sri Ramakrishna told him, "Why do you come here if you won't acknowledge my Mother?" Naren asked, "Must I accept Her simply

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because I come here?" The Master did not argue. "All right", he said, "ere long you shall not only acknowledge my Blessed Mother, but weep in Her name". And it did come to pass, though it took more time; and it was finally the terrible strain of poverty and starvation and his greater distress at seeing his family suffer that brought Naren to the feet of the Mother. Of this later.

Meanwhile Sri Ramakrishna went on with his self-imposed task of providing spiritual nourishment to Naren and the other young men whom he had chosen to be his disciples and to spread his gospel. One has only to read "The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna" containing notes of his conversations to see the profound wisdom and basic truths underlying his teachings. Just one or two illustrations would be sufficient to show the breadth and scope of this saga of spiritual education. As a warning to his listeners not to apply the *Advaita* truth in a literal fashion, which either vulgarised it or threw it open to the ridicule of reason, Sri Ramakrishna told the story of two students of *Advaita* one of whom functioned somewhat as Naren had done in his talks with Hazra on the inconsistency of *Advaita* with reason. When the two disciples were strolling along, they saw an elephant rushing along with the *mahout* shouting to everybody to get out of its way. One of the disciples took heed of the warning and climbed up a tree. The other told himself that all was one according to *Advaita* and strode up to his elephant brother to embrace him. To his horror, the brother did not recognise this fraternity but caught hold of him by his trunk and threw him out of the way leaving him hurt and bleeding. The disciple naturally went up to his Master to complain about the untruth of the *Advaita* doctrine. The Master told him, "Did not the *mahout* ask you to get out of the way? Why did you not heed him who was also your brother in the Universal Reality?" With this simple story, Sri Ramakrishna brought home to his disciples the profound truth that recognition of the One in the

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Many did not absolve the individual from exercising his own judgement according to reason when it came to matters of daily conduct. *Advaita* was not a doctrine of passivity or of individual irresponsibility. God was no alibi for individual stupidity. Another story he told related to the dead weight of traditional usage when it was accepted without discrimination. A householder who used to worship his gods daily in the prayer room of his house was disturbed by the house cat that would come in at that time; so he drove a nail in the wall and hung up the cat on it, releasing it after he had finished his worship. In due course the householder died and so did the cat. When the son wanted to resume the worship, there was no cat to be placed in the puja room. So he went out into the street and brought in a stray cat whom he hung up on the nail before starting his worship. Thus, Sri Ramakrishna drove home to his disciples the truth that tradition was not infallible and that truth or holy practices coming down from the past had to be re-examined to separate the grain from the chaff. To illustrate the quality of non-attachment while still functioning in the material world, he would talk of the lotus that grew embedded in slime and dirt yet blossomed into beauty and glory. To illustrate his thesis that God comes to those who seek Him and show how badly they need Him, he would talk of the mother who, leaving her child on the floor, would go round the house doing her daily chores, but the moment she heard the child crying she would drop everything she was doing and rush back to give the child the security of her presence.

To convince himself, and the others whom he taught later, that all religions were but different ways to reach the same God, this scion of traditional Hindu orthodoxy lived the life of a Christian and then of a Muslim and found himself blessed with visions of both Jesus Christ and Prophet Mohammad. He was also gifted with a vision of the Buddha. And by realisation, he found the

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oneness of the God whom the different schools of Hinduism such as, *Advaita*, *Dwaita*, and *Vishishtadwaita* were identifying with their irreconciliable and exclusive philosophies. He could now tell his listeners: God is one, different religions are but different ways of reaching Him. I know it. I have realised it. Do not therefore revile any religion. God can come to you through any path you follow and in any form you desire. But what is needed is intense longing for God. He comes to those who long for Him, weep for Him and keep on seeking for Him with single-minded devotion. "Pray in any form", he would say, "for the Lord hears the foot-fall even of an ant". To the question whether God was Personal or Impersonal, Sri Ramakrishna would reply: "He is both and yet He is beyond—beyond any intellectual or theological dogmas. He is manifest in the soul's own innermost realisation. He assumes any form for the pleasure of His devotee. He is not to be put between the covers of a book or in the boundary of a temple". To the question whether image worship was right or wrong he would reply that worship of anything was right which helped one to see God. To quote from what Vivekananda's biographers had to say about Sri Ramakrishna: "The most eloquent and convincing power in all the methods of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings was the spiritual radiance of his personal life. His character was the power behind his teaching. The man who preached universal love and toleration lived it." As Shri R. R. Diwakar, the eminent biographer of Sri Ramakrishna, has said, "In the whole hagiology of the world, there is no other instance of a single person and his consciousness having experienced in his own self and total being the *sadhana* or spiritual disciplines not only of one's own tradition but of all the traditions of major religions and mystics. For instance, he had gone through the following *sadhanas*, namely, *Bhakti* (Dwaita), *Tantra* (Advaita), Christian, Islamic and *Purusha Prakriti*. Strange to say, he was in the ecstatic mood of Radha for

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six months during which period, it is said, that he experienced menstruation. Ultimately, though Mother Kali was his *Ishta Devatha*, he declared that Mother is *Brahman* and both are the same. Intellectual appreciation, momentary emotional experience of oneness of all religions and faiths or equality thereof (*sama bhava*) is one thing; and experience of the same with one's totality of being is another." No wonder that some people regard Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa as the most perfect of *avatars*: and he lived in this mortal world not so long ago. It was the good fortune of Narendra to have not only lived during this period but also become the most loved of all his disciples.

The quintessence of his teaching, however, as far as the subsequent work of the mission his disciples founded in his name was concerned, was revealed by him sometime during 1884 when he was talking to his disciples among whom was Naren. Talking of Lord Krishna and his *Vaishnavism*, he said, "This religion enjoins upon its followers the practice of three things, namely, relish for the name of God, compassion for all living creatures, and service to the *Vaishnavas*, the devotees of the Lord." Asserting that God was not different from his Name, that Krishna and *Vaishnava* were not separate from one another, and as the world belonged to Sri Krishna utmost compassion should be shown to all living creatures, he fell into *samadhi* as he uttered the word, "compassion". After a while, he returned to a semi-conscious state and was heard muttering to himself "compassion for creatures!! compassion for creatures! thou to show compassion to others! Who art thou to show compassion? No, it cannot be. It is not compassion for others, but rather service to man, recognising him to be the veritable manifestation of God." Naren, who had not only heard but also understood what the Master was saying, told the others when he left the room, "What a strange light have I discovered in these words of the Master. How beautifully he has re-

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conciled the ideal of *Bhakti* with the knowledge of *Vedanta*, generally interpreted as hard, austere, and inimical to human sentiments and emotions. What a grand, natural and sweet synthesis! From these words of wisdom which Sri Ramakrishna uttered in an ecstatic mood I have understood that the ideal of *Vedanta* lived by the recluse outside the pale of society can be practised even from hearth and home and applied to all our daily schemes of life. Service of man, knowing him to be the manifestation of God, purifies the heart and, in no time such an aspirant realises himself as part and parcel of God. Existence — Knowledge — Bliss Absolute. Real devotion is far off until the aspirant realises the identity of God. By realising Him in and through all beings and by serving Him through humanity, the devotee acquires real devotion. All his activities should be directed to the service of man, the manifestation of God upon earth, and this will accelerate his progress towards the goal. However, if it is the will of God, the day will soon come when I shall proclaim this grand truth before the world at large. I shall make it the common property of all, the wise and the fool, the rich and the poor, the *Brahmin* and the *Pariah.*" However Naren soon forgot the wisdom he had imbibed on this occasion. Some years had to elapse before the message would flash back to Naren's mind and become the great revelation that was to govern his future mission.

It would take another whole book to do even faint justice to Sri Ramakrishna as a teacher, but there was no doubt that his skill as a teacher of spirituality did a great deal to reconcile religion with reason in Naren's mind, and provide him the intellectual capital which made him such a great world teacher of Vedantic wisdom.

Sri Ramakrishna's influence on Naren and his fellow disciples was not merely due to his skill in exposition. More important was the Master's personality, his utter sincerity, the obvious wealth of personal realisation that lay behind his talking of God and the Mother, his child like simplicity, and his utter disregard for things

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of the flesh and the material world. On Naren, however, the profound love that he exhibited for him played an even more important role. And he would have been less than human if he had not also been touched by the faith in his destiny shown by the Master and continuous display of confidence in his ability and fitness for functioning as God's chosen instrument and as a leader in carrying out his Master's mission. And yet Naren was such an independent person and a tough rationalist that the Master had to use his spiritual power to transmit to him actual realisation of the truth underlying the *Advaita* doctrine of the *Para Brahman* or the Universal Reality. Of course transmission of the capacity for mystic personal realisation could not have been effected if Naren himself did not possess the latent power for almost instant realisation at the touch of the Master. The Master knew his pupil and the pupil deserved the Master. Basically what bound them together was knowledge of the pupil and love for him on the part of the Master and love for the Master and knowledge obtained from him on the part of the pupil. As Narendra often used to say in later years: "Sri Ramakrishna was the only person who, ever since he had met me, believed in me and uniformly throughout—even my mother and brothers did not do so. It was his unflinching trust and love for me that bound me to him for ever. He alone knew how to love another. Worldly people only make a show of love for selfish ends."

To resume the story of Naren one should not get the impression that Naren was doing nothing but going to Dakshineshwar and basking in the love of Sri Ramakrishna. He continued to live with his parents, study in his college and attend Brahmo Samaj meetings, delighting the gatherings there with his singing and himself getting stimulated by their programme of religious and social reform. And then came his first great personal trial. His father died suddenly in early 1884, after Naren had appeared for the B.A. examination and had not yet received the result. He found that his father had spent

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more than he had earned and had left him without resources and with the responsibility of maintaining his large family of seven or eight persons. With his father looking after his material needs, and living without care because of his affluence, Naren could indulge in his philosophic doubts and his religious quest. And now he found that the material world that he could so far afford to despise and long to get away from was knocking at his door imperiously, demanding his interest. From comfort Naren was suddenly thrown into poverty. Passing the B.A. examination he joined the Law classes, hoping to follow his father's profession to provide a living for his family. To quote from his biographers: "In college he was the poorest of the poor. Even shoes became a luxury: his garments were of the coarsest cloth, and many times he went to his classes without food. Often he became faint with hunger and weakness. His friends, now and then, invited him to their houses. He would chat happily with them for long hours, but when food was offered, the vision of the desolation at his home would come before him and prevent him from eating. He would leave with the excuse that he had a pressing engagement elsewhere. On reaching home he would eat as little as possible in order that the others might have enough. Often he would refuse to eat on the plea that he had already eaten at the house of a friend, when the fact was he did not eat at home for fear of depriving others of a full meal. At the same time he tried to be his ordinary, boyish, joyous self and to make light of his trials. The Datta family was proud in a lordly way, and concealed its misery under the cloak of pride. His friends, sons of wealthy families of Calcutta, drove up in magnificent carriages to Naren's home to take him for drives and pleasure trips, never suspecting that his wasting away physically was due to any other cause than an exaggerated grief at the loss of his father."

Naren had to find work to make both ends meet. It was a period

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of trial and hardship for a young man of 21 who had hitherto not known what it was to face material want for himself, let alone his family. It is best to quote Naren's own description of what he went through:

"Even before the period of mourning was over, I had to knock about in search of a job. Starving and barefooted, I wandered from office to office under the scorching noon-day sun with an application in hand, one or two intimate friends who sympathised with me in my misfortunes accompanying me sometimes. But everywhere the door was slammed in my face. This first contact with the reality of life convinced me that unselfish sympathy was a rarity in the world—there was no place in it for the weak, the poor and the destitute. I noticed that those who only a few days ago would have been proud to help me in any way now turned their face against me, though they had enough to spare. Seeing all this, the world sometimes seemed to me to be the handiwork of the devil. Sometimes when I found that there were not enough provisions for the family and my purse was empty, I would pretend to my mother that I had an invitation to dine out and remain practically without food. Out of self-respect I could not disclose the facts to others. My rich friends sometimes requested me to come to their homes or gardens and sing. I had to comply when I could not avoid it. I did not feel inclined to express my woes before them nor did they try, themselves, to find out my difficulties. In spite of all these troubles, however, I never lost faith in the existence of God nor in His divine mercy. Every morning taking His name I got up and went out in search of a job. One day my mother overheard me and said bitterly, 'Hush, you fool, you have been crying yourself hoarse for God from your childhood, and what has He done for you.' I was stung to the quick. Doubt crossed my mind. 'Does God really exist', I thought, 'and if so, does He really hear the fervent

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prayer of man? Then why is there no response to my passionate appeals? Why is there so much woe in His benign kingdom? Why does Satan rule in the realm of the Merciful God?' I was exceedingly cross with God. It was also the most opportune moment for doubt to creep into my heart. It was ever against my nature to do anything secretly. So it was quite natural for me now to proceed to prove before the world that God was a myth, or that, even if He existed, to call upon Him was fruitless. Soon the report gained currency that I was an atheist and did not scruple to drink or even frequent houses of ill fame. This unmerited calumny hardened my heart still more. I openly declared that in this miserable world there was nothing reprehensible in a man who, seeking for a brief respite, would resort to anything. Not only that, but if I was once convinced of the efficacy of such a course, I would not, through fear of anybody, shrink from following it."

But Naren would not easily succumb to the feelings brought on by his personal misfortune. He could not forget the visions he had experienced after coming into contact with Sri Ramakrishna. He was sure that God must exist and there was a way of realising Him. At the same time the fact that he could get no response to his plea for the alleviation of his sufferings made him doubt this belief. Days passed and his mind continued to waver between doubt and certainty. And then there took place an experience that was to settle his doubts and set him firmly on the path that had been chalked out for him by his Master. It is best to quote Naren himself on this matter:

"One evening, after a whole day's fast and exposure to rain, I was returning home with tired limbs and a jaded mind; overpowered with exhaustion and unable to move a step forward, I sank down on the outer plinth of a house on the roadside. I can't say whether I was insensible for a time or not. Various thoughts crowded in on

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my mind, and I was too weak to drive them off and fix my attention on a particular thing. Suddenly I felt as if by some divine power the coverings of my soul were removed one after another. All my former doubts regarding the co-existence of divine justice and mercy and the presence of misery in the creation of a Blissful Providence, were automatically solved. By a deep introspection I found the meaning of it all and was satisfied. As I proceeded homewards, I found there was no trace of fatigue in the body and the mind was refreshed with wonderful strength and peace. The night was well-nigh over. Henceforth I became deaf to the praise and blame of worldly people. I was convinced that I was not born like humdrum people to earn money and maintain my family, much less to strive for sense-pleasure. I began secretly to prepare myself to renounce the world like my grand-father. I fixed a day for the purpose and was glad to hear that the Master was to come to Calcutta on that very day. 'It is lucky', I thought, 'I shall leave the world with the blessings of my *Guru*.' As soon as I met the Master, he pressed me hard to spend that night with him at Dakshineshwar. Then at night he dismissed the others and calling me to his side said, 'I know you have come for the Mother's work, and won't be able to remain in the world. But for my sake, stay as long as I live.' Saying this he burst into tears again. The next day with his permission I returned home."

Naren however had still the problem of maintaining his family. By working in an attorney's office and translating a few books he earned just enough to live from hand to mouth, but there was no fixed or stable income to maintain his family. Naren then remembered that it was Sri Ramakrishna who had dissuaded him from taking *sanyas* at once and persuaded him to stay on in the material world. He also remembered the Master telling him that God listened to his prayers. So he hurried to Dakshineshwar and asked him to make an appeal on behalf of his starving family. Sri Ramakrishna

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told him that he could not make such demands and said: "Why don't you go and ask the Mother yourself? All your sufferings are due to your disregard of Her." Naren had loudly proclaimed his disbelief in idol worship in the past and had rebuked Rakhal for bowing before the image of Kali and desisted only after Sri Ramakrishna's intervention. How could he now not only go to that Kali but also ask Her for a favour? So he again pleaded with the Master to pray to Her on his behalf. Sri Ramakrishna replied that he had done so repeatedly, but She did not grant his prayer because Naren had not accepted Her. He told Naren, "Today is Tuesday, go to the Kali temple tonight, prostrate yourself before the Mother and ask Her any boon you like. It shall be granted. Everything is in Her power to give." At this Naren's life-long resistance to idol worship broke down. His own pressing need not only to find sustenance for his family but also to get freedom to renounce the world was urging him to follow Sri Ramakrishna's advice. Also he had a profound belief in his Master's spiritual strength as also in his affection for him. So he agreed to do what he had been told. Once the decision was taken, disbelief gave way to belief in an almost instantaneous fashion and a strange sense of excitement filled him. What happened then is best told in Naren's own words: "About nine o' clock the Master commanded me to go to the temple. As I went, I was filled with a divine intoxication. My feet were unsteady. My heart was leaping in anticipation of the joy of beholding the living Goddess and hearing Her words. I was full of the idea. Reaching the temple as I cast my eyes upon the image, I actually found that the Divine Mother was living and conscious, the Perennial Fountain of Divine Love and Beauty. I was caught in a surging wave of devotion and love. In an ecstasy of joy I prostrated myself again and again before the Mother and prayed, 'Mother, give me discrimination! Give me renunciation! Give unto me knowledge and devotion! Grant that I may have an uninterrupted vision of Thee!'

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A serene peace reigned in my soul. The world was forgotten. Only the Divine Mother shone within my heart."

When Naren returned from the temple, the Master asked him about the Mother's response to the plea for the removal of his worldly wants. Naren, who had completely forgotten the original reason for his going to the Kali temple, replied that he had forgotten to make the request and wondered what could be done now. "Go again", said the Master, "and tell Her about your wants". Naren went but again he forgot his original intention in the excitement and exaltation at feeling the Divine Presence. He could only pray and ask for love and devotion. Returning, he was asked the same question by Sri Ramakrishna and gave the same answer. The Master sent him to Kali for the third time asking him this time to control himself and not forget to ask for maintenance of his family. Poor Naren went in again, but could not bring himself to ask for such a petty favour as money or means of living. He felt ashamed of himself for having originally entertained such a petty thought and this time he told the Divine Mother deliberately, "Mother, I want nothing but knowledge and devotion." He now knew it was all a game on the part of Sri Ramakrishna who wanted to taste to the full the victory implicit in Naren's repudiation of his previous denial of the Mother. So he accused Sri Ramakrishna of making him forget his wants by casting a spell over his mind and asked the Master himself to grant him the boon that his people at home may no longer suffer the pinch of poverty. Sri Ramakrishna had no escape. He had told Naren to ask the Mother for worldly happiness and instead Naren had asked for knowledge and devotion. At last, he told Naren: "All right, your people at home will never be in want of plain food and clothing." Naren could now go in for *sanyasa* without feeling that he had failed in his duty to his family. The last obstacle in the way of Naren's following the path of renunciation was now overcome; and, with it, Naren had also

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come to accept the Mother, even as he had earlier accepted the reality of the Universal Soul proclaimed in the ancient scriptures of the Hindus. How Naren came to accept idol worship and that too of the Mother Principle is a secret that he would not share with any one. But he told Sister Nivedita, "How I used to hate Kali and all Her ways ! That was the ground of my six years' fight that I would not accept Her—Yes, I fought so long. But I had to accept Her at last. Ramakrishna Paramahamsa dedicated me to Her. I loved him, you see, and that was what held me. I saw his marvellous purity." After reminding her that Sri Ramakrishna had accepted Kali and was constantly urging him to do so as well, Vivekananda, as he had now become, continued: "I had great misfortunes at that time—It was an opportunity—She made a slave of me." Then he gave his declaration of reconciliation between the *Para Brahman* and idol worship: "You see, I cannot but believe that there is somewhere a great power that thinks of herself as feminine and called Kali and Mother—And I believe in *Brahman* too—Unity in Complexity—It is the *Brahman*. It is the One. And yet—and yet—it is the gods too." Had not Sri Ramakrishna who had worshiped Kali both as the Mother and the *Brahman* said repeatedly: *Brahman* and *Shakti* are one, even as fire and its heat, even as milk and its whiteness. The Reality when static is the *Brahman*, when active, it is *Shakti*, the Mother." So now the stage was set for Naren to renounce the world and take up the leadership of the misson the Master had assigned for him in his mind. But that was not yet to be. Naren had to see him whom he regarded as a divine being suffering from the pains of illness like any human mortal and in the process take the initial steps for the formation of a brotherhood of monks that subsequently became the Sri Ramakrishna Mission.

Thus, for nearly four years, Naren had the unique joy of frequent meetings with Sri Ramakrishna and, through his love and

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inspired teaching, acquired the basic truths of both *Vedantic Hinduism* and *Vaishnav Bhakti* through actual realisation. A new phase was to begin when, in the middle of 1885, Sri Ramakrishna showed the first symptoms of a throat trouble which eventually turned out to be cancer. The doctors diagnosed it as a "clergyman's sore throat" and warned him against talking and going into *samadhi*. It was difficult for the disciples to make the Master conform to this part of the medical advice, and his condition grew worse. Narendra realised the gravity of the situation, as he suspected it was cancer for which there was no cure. It was agreed that Sri Ramakrishna should shift his residence to Calcutta for better treatment and the Master was removed to a good house in Shyampukur, with Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar, the leading homeopath of Calcutta, undertaking his treatment. The Holy Mother (Sarada Devi, Sri Ramakrishna's spouse) came down from Dakshineshwar to do the cooking while Naren and his fellow disciples decided to devote themselves to the Master's personal service and to the realisation of God. Householder devotees found the funds, while the young disciples gave their personal service, convinced that this was an opportunity for serving the *Guru* who had given them so much spiritual food, and, to intensify their spiritual training by this daily contact. While the disciples argued among themselves as to why their Master, whom many believed was an Incarnation, should be exposed to a human ailment, Naren saw in it an inseparable connection between the human and the divine. The young disciples were moved by the Master's sufferings and overcome by an emotionalism that seemed spiritual but was really a display of sentimental weakness. As Sri Ramakrishna had been hailed as an Incarnation—after Vijay Krishna Goswami had told them of the vision he had of the Master as he sat in meditation in his room at Dacca—some of the disciples waited for a miraculous recovery, while others fell into convulsions and partial trances on hear-

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ing devotional music. Narendra saw the dangers inherent in such a behaviour and had to tell them that physical contortions, tears, and even momentary trances were really of a hysterical character in most cases and could not be compared with the Master's behaviour and *Samadhis*. He would tell them "of 100 persons who take up the spiritual life 80 turn out to be charlatans and 15 become insane. Only the remaining five may be blessed with a vision of the real truth. Therefore, beware." The mantle of leadership was falling on young Naren for disciplining and shaping the character of his fellow disciples. And, fortunately for him, the build-up that had been given to him by his Master, apart from his own imperious personality and emotional fervour, helped in discharging his self-imposed task of preserving the Master's heritage.

Meanwhile, the Master's condition was going from bad to worse. Dr. Sarkar advised removal to some garden house in the suburbs to escape the foul and congested air of Calcutta. A garden house belonging to Gopal Chandra Ghose was hired at 80 rupees a month and on December 11 Sri Ramakrishna moved to his new residence. Though he felt much refreshed by the beautiful scenery and fresh air, nothing could stay the progress of the disease. His body grew weaker and the boys, led by Naren, gave all their time to nursing him. This meant day and night stay at the Cossipore garden, which naturally met with opposition from their guardians. It was Naren who gave them not only moral support but also spiritual strength by gathering them together and spending the time in study, music, conversations, and discussion of the divine traits of their Master. He moulded these heterogeneous elements into a homogeneous whole, with every one of them growing into a tower of strength in conservation and single-minded devotion. The 12, who subsequently became well-known monks of the Ramakrishna Order were Narendra, Rakhal, Baburam, Niranjan, Yogen, Latu, Tarak, Gopal Senior, Kali, Shashi, Sharat and Gopal Junior.

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Naren kept on warning them about the possibility of the Master's leaving them soon and urged them to take the utmost advantage of the Master when he was still alive by serving him and concentrating on prayer and meditation and thus developing their spirituality. The Cossipore garden house became a temple and a university hall in one. At times philosophy held the floor, at others devotion with singing and chanting, and then they would be sent to meditate by the Master. Sri Ramakrishna from his sick bed was preparing this young group to take up the task of carrying out his mission. In preparation for their impending monastic life he commanded them to beg for food from door to door; and when the rice thus collected was cooked, he took some saying, "well done, this food is very pure". Sri Ramakrishna encouraged them to go to Naren if they were in difficulties or had any differences, telling them he was their leader and that his spiritual understanding should be their infallible guide in future. Meanwhile, his health continued to get worse. He was sinking daily. He suffered from almost continuous pain. But he continued talking to his disciples giving them his love and his wisdom. He gave broad hints about his being an Incarnation and about his pupils being predestined to carry on his message. When Naren left with Tarak and Kali for Bodh Gaya to meditate there, Sri Ramakrishna showed no anxiety. He was sure that even if they went round the world in search of true religion, they would all come back to him because whatever of spirituality there was, it was all in him. And they did come back. Sri Ramakrishna had now only a few days left in the world. When one day, Gopal Senior brought some *gerua* clothes and *rudraksha* beads for distribution among *sadhus*, the Master said: "Here are boys full of renunciation. You won't be able to find better monks anywhere. Distribute the clothes and beads among them." He called the boys the future apostles of the Ramakrishna Order and put them through a certain cere-

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mony. Thus the Master himself initiated them as monks and freed them from all restrictions of caste and creed.

Then came Naren's greatest moment of spiritual realisation. He had learnt about the *Vedanta* and become aware of its spiritual content, but had not received a vision of the Absolute. He longed for this realisation so that he could experience the identity of the individual and the cosmos and proclaim with the confidence born of experience "I am the *Brahman*"—*Aham Brahmasmi*. He had pleaded with the Master for a long time to grant him this realisation but to no effect. And now that the Master was about to pass away Naren got his realisation. All that we know about what he realised can only be gleaned from the poem, "The Hymn of Samadhi", which he wrote after this experience. When Naren returned to normal and presented himself before the Master, Sri Ramakrishna, looking deep into his eyes, told him : "Now then the Mother has shown you everything, just as a treasure is locked up in a box, so will the realisation you have just had be locked up and the key shall remain with me. You have work to do. When you will have finished my work, the treasure box will be unlocked again, and you will know everything then, just as you do now." The Master told the other disciples later: "Naren will pass away only of his own will. The moment he realises who he is, he will refuse to stay a moment in the body. The time will come when he will shake the world to its foundations through the strength of his intellectual and spiritual powers. I have prayed that the Divine Mother may keep this realisation of the Absolute veiled from Naren. There is much work to be done by him. But this veil is so very thin that it may give way at any time."

Now that the last days were approaching, the Master redoubled his efforts to complete the training of his disciples, though he could only speak in a whisper or make his wishes known by signs. His special interest was Naren whom he would call for

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two or three hours at a time and impart final instructions to him on various spiritual subjects and advise him on how to keep his brother-disciples together and how to guide and train them so that they would be able to live the life of renunciation. Three or four days before his passing away into *Mahasamadhi*, Sri Ramakrishna called Naren and, looking steadfastly at him, entered into deep meditation. Naren felt as if a subtle force resembling an electric shock was entering his body and he lost all outer consciousness. When he returned to normal, he found the Master weeping. When Naren asked him why he wept, Sri Ramakrishna answered: "Oh Naren, today I have given you my all and have become a *fakir*, a penniless beggar. By the force of the power transmitted by me, great things will be done by you; only after that will you go to whence you came." The Master had thus given his pupil what is called the *Shakti Pata Deeksha* or initiation by direct transmission of the *Guru's* own power to the disciple. The Master, by this final act of renunciation, had completed his self-imposed task of making Naren the messenger of his mission for humanity.

There was nothing more left for the Master to do. His suffering on the last day was intense. The physician who came on an urgent summons could do nothing. A little before dusk, the Master complained of difficulty in breathing. Suddenly he entered into *samadhi* of a rather unusual kind. After midnight he recovered consciousness of the world, ate a small quantity of porridge and appeared to be better. Leaning against five or six pillows supported by Shashi, he talked up to the last moment with Naren, giving him his last counsel in a low voice. Then uttering the name of Kali thrice, he lay gently back on the bed. It was now two minutes past one and the day was August 16, 1886. A thrill now passed through the Master's body, the hair stood on end, the eyes became fixed on the tip of the nose, a divine smile lit up his face, and he entered into a trance. That was the end. The

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Master had now passed into the *Mahasamadhi* from which there is no return to the mortal plane of existence. But he had left his mission behind him. The next phase was to begin now, but without the physical presence and the endearing smile of the Master. Naren had now to take the place vacated by Sri Ramakrishna and in the process became the Swami Vivekananda.

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IV

Narendra and His Fellow Disciples

THE YOUNG disciples whom Sri Ramakrishna had initiated into the monastic order were now bound together by shared memories of Sri Ramakrishna. The Master's place as leader was now taken by Narendra. After spending a fortnight in the Cossipore garden house with continuous thoughts of the Master and the accounts of his own experience of him given by Narendra, the young monks shifted to Baranagore where they were to spend the next six years. A dreary and deserted place, with the reputation of being haunted, the house was rented for Rs.10 a month. Tarak and Gopal Senior occupied the house first; Rakhal, Kali, Yogen and Latu were on pilgrimage; and Naren was heavily involved in a law suit involving the possession of his ancestral house, though he visited Baranagore often and spent most of the nights and a large part of the days there. Naren believed that it was his mission to strengthen the spirit of renunciation in his fellow disciples and make them concentrate on realisation. Late one evening, on Christmas eve in 1886, the monks gathered before a huge log fire, when Naren talked to them of the life of Jesus Christ and asked them to become Christ themselves, to aid in the redemption of the world, realise God, and deny themselves a self-regarding life, as Lord Jesus had done. They were so inspired by the atmosphere and

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Naren's words that standing before the fire, they all took the vows of *sanyas* before God and one another. They had hardly any resources except for what Surendra Nath Mitra provided for their bare bodily needs. Talking of those days in Baranagore, Narendra would say: "There were days at Baranagore *Math* when we had nothing to eat. If there was rice, salt was lacking. Some days, that was all we had, but nobody cared. Leaves of the Bima creeper boiled, salt and rice - this was our diet for months. Come what would, we were indifferent. We were being carried on in a strong tide of religious practices and meditation. Oh, what days! Demons would have run away at the sight of such austerities, to say nothing of men. Ask Rakhal, Shashi and others; they will tell you. The more circumstances are against you, the more manifest becomes your inner power."

Swami Sadananda, an early disciple of Swami Vivekananda, extolled the latter's role in those days in these words: "During these years Swamiji would work 24 hours at a time. He was like a lunatic in his activity. Early in the morning, whilst it was still dark he would rise and call the others, singing, 'Awake! Arise, all ye who would drink of the divine nectar!' And, long after midnight, he and the other monks would still be sitting on the roof of the monastery building, singing canticles of praise. Those were strenuous days. There was no time for rest. Outsiders came and went. *Pandits* argued and discussed. But he, the Swami, was never for one moment idle, never dull." It was not however just singing and chanting that occupied their time. Hours were spent in study and discussion of philosophy. Kant, Hegel, Mill and Spencer, *Sankhya, Yoga, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Mimamsa* and *Vedanta* all came up for discussion; while religion, theology, history, sociology, literature, art and science were also touched upon. And then there would be meditation. Some would sit motionless for hours plunged in meditation and some would spend nights at the burning ghat

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absorbed in *Japa* and meditation, while others would tell their beads all day and all night or sit night after night before the log fire in their intense determination to realise God. The spirit of *sanyas* dominated the place and the young monks who had made it their habitation. Thus it was at Baranagore that the monks went in for a kind of spiritual *sadhana*, and got consolidated into the monastic order of Sri Ramakrishna. The old names were changed for new ones to complete their severance from the old world and its associations. Rakhal and Yogen became Swamis Brahmananda and Yogananda, respectively; Baburam and Niranjan, Swamis Premananda and Niranjanananda; Shashi and Hari, Swamis Ramakrishnananda and Turiyananda; Latu and Sarada, Swamis Adbhutananda and Trigunatitananda; Tarak and Kali, Swamis Shivananda and Abhedananda; and Gopal Senior and Subodh became Swamis Advaitananda and Subodhananda. Some years later the list was completed by Hari Prasanna under the name of Swami Vijnanananda. Naren did not assume any permanent name. It was only on the eve of his sailing for America in 1893 to attend the Parliament of Religions that Narendra assumed the name of Swami Vivekananda, which was to become known all over the world. We shall refer to him as the Swami during the intervening period, as he had already assumed formal monkhood, though not a permanent new name as a monk.

The spirit of *sanyas* had got so much into the monks that they were not satisfied even with the holy atmosphere of Baranagore and wanted to live as wandering monks depending solely on God. Naren himself was feeling the urge. He started feeling that his very attachment to his brother monks was impeding his progress towards realisation of God and thought of getting free from this silken bond by setting out as a wandering monk. At first his absences were temporary and he would return to Baranagore to continue teaching his fellow disciples and strengthen their resolve to

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function as missionaries of Sri Ramakrishna. The monks were not all that easy to handle; and they had their own individual ideas of what they should do or become. It was the Swami who had to interpret Sri Ramakrishna for them; and it was he who took them to task and brought them back to the right path if they appeared to stray from it. He could do all this and successfully, for had not Sri Ramakrishna told the disciples that Naren was far superior to them and it was he to whom they should turn for resolution of doubts and difficulties and a true interpretation of his teachings. But the main motif with all of them was God realisation and it had to be personal. The social and human implications of *Advaita* were yet to be understood by them. All they now wanted was to attain *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* and get a personal realisation of the Absolute as their Master had done. Austerities and meditation were therefore all they were interested in. The Swami himself was even more anxious to get back the God realisation he had received at the touch of Sri Ramakrishna and felt that his continuous responsibility for his fellow monks was coming in the way.

Evidently Narendra had forgotten the great message that he had received from his Master two years earlier. At that time, talking of Lord Krishna and Vaishnavism, Sri Ramakrishna had declared that compassion was not enough and that what was required was service of man, recognising him as the veritable manifestation of God on earth. This replacement of the traditional concept of realisation or salvation through personal austerities and meditation by that of the service of man had impressed him enormously at that time and led him to declare that some day he would proclaim this great Vedantic truth to the whole world. But now when the Master had departed and the disciples were all bent on personal God realisation through austerity and meditation, reviving the traditional concept that the Master had in fact sought to dispel, Narendra also fell in line. In fact, he was more eager than the

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others in seeking God realisation without being hampered by attachment to human beings. It was to take some more years and actual contact with the human poverty and misery that abounded in his country before his memory recovered the Master's message. Meanwhile he had decided to leave his fellow disciples to start on the traditional path of the wandering monk in search of God realisation.

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V

The Wandering Monk

HIS FIRST trip was to Varanasi from where he returned to Baranagore after a week. Soon he left again for a visit to the northern *thirthas* or places of pilgrimage. He began with Varanasi, then went to Ayodhya, Lucknow, Agra, Brindavan, Hathras, and Hrishikesh. He was intending to proceed to Kedarnath and Badrinarayan but fell ill with malarial fever. He then returned to Baranagore where he stayed for the whole of 1889 and resumed the work of teaching and training his fellow monks in Vedantic literature and the sacred books of the Hindus. The Swami was now getting increasingly interested in the social customs that had emerged from mis-interpretations and anomalies in the scriptures he was teaching. He saw how the caste system had lost its ethos by a slavish surrender to birth and heredity, and how the *Shastras* needed to be rescued from the degenerate practices that had obscured their original meaning. He was also disturbed by the poverty in which his mother and brothers were living and the continuing litigation over their ancestral properties, and felt like plunging into secular activity in order to retrieve their position. Fortunately the law suit was settled in their favour. The Swami again began to feel a strong urge to resume his pilgrimage and spend his time in meditation. So he started again for Varanasi but on

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his way heard that one of his fellow disciples, Yogananda, had fallen ill at Allahabad. The Swami rushed to Allahabad and nursed him back to health. There he heard of Pavhari Baba, a reputed saint of Ghazipur, who stayed in an underground hermitage dug by him by the river bank, practised severe austerities. and gave away the food he cooked to the poor or wandering monks, living on such a spare diet that he came to be known as Pavhari Baba or the Air-eating Father. The Swami was able to meet Pavhari Baba and was so impressed that he began to practise severe austerities himself, live on coarse food obtained by begging. and spend his time seeking fresh knowledge from the saint. He was anxious to learn from him the *yoga* that would keep him serene in the midst of his concern for the troubles and trials of his fellow monks and concentrate on realising the *Brahman*. He was even prepared to become his disciple, but desisted when he saw his Master in a vision looking at him but without speaking a word. The vision finally convinced him that Sri Ramakrishna was the embodiment of all spirituality and no other spiritual guide was necessary. He now meditated on Sri Ramakrishna, bearing in mind Patanjali's aphorism "For the goal may be obtained by meditating on the pure soul of a saint"; and his mind became free from distractions. He got angry however when a friend from Varanasi came to Ghazipur under the mistaken impression that the Swami's interest in Pavhari Baba was an indication of his disloyalty to Sri Ramakrishna. It has always been the bane of Hinduism and indeed of all religions that loyalty is identified with exclusiveness. The Swami's reaction to this was characteristic and showed how well he had learnt the message of his Master. He told his friend that these notions of exclusiveness of loyalties were the ideas of lunatics and bigots, "for all *gurus* are one, fragments and radiations of God, the Universal *Guru*". He told himself that he must not be overpowered any more by his love for his *gurubhais* (fellow disciples).

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But when he heard that Abhedananda was ill at Varanasi he could not help hurrying there to make arrangements for his care. He then returned to his meditation, thinking himself lucky that he could do so at Varanasi; but he was again to be interrupted. This time it was the news of the passing away of Balaram Bose, the great household devotee of his Master. Grief-stricken, he rushed back to Calcutta to give solace to the bereaved family. His presence was also badly needed at Baranagore which was in serious financial difficulties with the passing away of its benefactor, Surendra Nath Mitra, on May 25, 1890. He was also upset that no memorial had yet been raised to his Master and began plans for the purpose. But his restlessness was also increasing. Baranagore *Math* and his fellow monks were involving him in responsibilities that were interfering with his desire to take to the life of an itinerant monk and acquire the confidence to begin preaching his Master's message to a wider world. He wrote to a fellow monk that he was "longing for a flight to the Himalayas", told his fellow disciples that he would not return until he acquired such realisation that his very touch would transform a man, sought and obtained the blessings of the Holy Mother, and set out on another pilgrimage in July 1890, this time with the intention perhaps never to return.

Accompanied by Swami Akhandananda, he first went to Bhagalpur, then to Vaidyanath, and then to Varanasi. He did not tarry long at Varanasi but went on to Nainital. After a fortnight in Nainital, he and his companion left on foot for Almora on the way to Badrikashrama. It was on this journey that meditating under an ancient peepul tree on a river bank, he got his historic vision of the oneness of the microcosm with the macrocosm. What modern scientific theory is now developing, the Swami saw in his vision, but in his own way. This is what he wrote: "The microcosm and the macrocosm are built on the same plan. Just as the individual soul is encased in a living body, so is the Universal

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Soul in the living *Prakriti*, the objective universe. This covering of the one by the other is analogous to the relation between an idea and the word expressing it; they are one and the same and it is only by a mental abstraction that one can distinguish them. This dual aspect of the Universal Soul is eternal. So what we perceive or feel is this combination of the Eternally Formed and the Eternally Formless.". From Almora, the Swami left for Garhwal, accompanied by Akhandananda and reached Karmaprayag on the way to Badrikashrama. But the journey had to be given up, the road having been closed by Government on account of famine. After leaving Karmaprayag, both the Swami and Akhandananda fell ill with fever at Chati. Recovering they went to Rudraprayag where again they got high fever. A local official, after giving them some Ayurvedic medicines which brought about some improvement, sent them by *dandi* to Srinagar. The monks had covered the distance of 120 miles from Almora in a little more than two weeks in spite of repeated illness and their having to beg their food on the journey. At Srinagar, the monks took up their residence in a hut on the banks of the Alaknanda river and the Swami taught the members of the party the main teachings of the *Upanishads*. Akhandananda fell ill again and had to be removed to the plains. The Swami accompanied him to Dehra Dun, giving up his plans to settle down at Ganeshprayag on the Ganga for a long spell of meditation. His plans for concentrating on meditation had again fallen through. After spending about three weeks in Dehra Dun and advising Akhandananda to go to Allahabad, the party left for Hrishikesh. In the way, the Swami fell severely ill himself and became unconscious and almost pulseless when he was saved by an indigenous medicine administered by an inhabitant of the hills. His brother monks took him to Hrishikesh and then to Meerut where Swami Akhandananda had been under the treatment of Dr. Trailokya Nath Ghose. The Swami's stay of five months in Meerut

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revived memories of Baranagore, with the Swami explaining the Sanskrit classics of *Mrichakatika*, *Abhijnana Sakuntala* and *Kumara Sambhava* to his brother monks who also held singing parties and practised meditation. At the end of the period, the Swami, who had fully recovered, felt restless again. He told his fellow monks that he was going to leave them in order to become the solitary monk. When one of them pleaded that he should be allowed to accompany him, the Swami told him that attachment to *gurubhais* was also *Maya*, for in the event of one or the other falling ill, they had to look after each other and were thus hindered in their resolution to attain realisation. "I am determined to have no longer any form of *Maya* about me", he declared, and casting away the attachment he felt for the company of his beloved fellow monks, the Swami left them one morning in the latter part of January 1891 and set out on his lonely journey.

His first halt was Delhi where he not only enjoyed the crisp winter weather but also the many historical monuments that dotted the city and proclaimed the ephemeral nature of human glory and the permanence of the human spirit. Some of his brother monks whom he had left at Meerut also came to Delhi not knowing he was there. When they discovered his presence there, they naturally went to him again with delight at recovering his company. The Swami was also glad to see them but he was inflexible in his decision to get away from this attachment. He told them he was leaving Delhi and asked them neither to follow him nor try to know his whereabouts. "I demand that you obey me", he said, "I am going to cut myself from all old associations. Whithersoever the spirit leads there shall I wander. It matters not whether it is a forest or a desert waste, a mountain region or a densely-populated city. I am off. I wish every one to strive for his own goal according to his light." The traditional desire of the Hindu

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monk for solitude and freedom from all human attachment so as to concentrate on attaining God-consciousness had overwhelmed him, making him forget the social and human aspects of the *Vedanta* which he had learnt from the Master.

The Swami left Delhi in the beginning of February 1891 and proceeded to Alwar. There he met a Bengali doctor Guru Charan Laskar who offered him hospitality and also brought a Mohammedan friend, a teacher of Persian and Urdu in the local High School, to see him. The Swami's appearance and conversation thrilled them and led them to tell all and sundry of the arrival of a holy Bengali monk in their city. Many Hindus and Muslims gathered in his room. His mission had now begun and he had forgotten his desire for solitude and realisation. After prayer and meditation from early morning till nine a.m., the Swami would start his discourses and answer questions. He talked to them of the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*, the *Bible* and the *Puranas*. In between there was singing of Urdu songs, Hindi *bhajans* and sometimes Bengali *kirtans*. And when the conversation turned on Mother-worship, he would lose himself in joy and his audience would share in his ecstasy.

An incident during his stay at Alwar illustrates the non-fanatical and non-traditional character of his faith. The Moulvi Saheb was most anxious to invite Swami to his house and give him the traditional hospitality meant for holy men. He was prepared to have all his furniture washed by Brahmins, and the food purchased and cooked by Brahmins in utensils brought from their houses. All that he desired was to see the Swami eating food at his residence and he would do so from a distance. The Swami peremptorily disdained all such restrictions and gladly allowed the Moulvi Saheb to entertain him at his residence. A number of other devout Muslims also invited the Swami to have his food

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at their residences. What Sri Ramakrishna had realised by *sadhana* the Swami was beginning to find was also realisable in practice. There was no need to talk of Hindu-Muslim unity. God and the message of Sri Ramakrishna was enough to break down the barriers created by man and bring Hindus and Muslims together in a common spirit of religious devotion.

Another incident illustrates both the Swami's boldness and his skill as a teacher. The Maharaja of Alwar who called on him was in a teasing mood. He smilingly told the Swami, "Well, Babaji Maharaj, I have no faith in idol worship. What is going to be my fate?" Swami replied that every man should follow his religious ideal according to his own faith. But he had not finished. Seeing a picture of the Maharaja hanging on the wall, he asked the *Dewan* to bring it to him and asked "Whose picture is this?" The *Dewan* replied that it was the likeness of the Maharaja. "Spit upon it", commanded the Swami, "What is it but a piece of paper." The *Dewan* was terrified and cried out, "This is the likeness of our Maharaja. How can I do such a thing?" The Swami replied that he knew it but he also knew it was only a piece of paper and did not contain either flesh and blood or speak or behave like the Maharaja. And yet they felt that in spitting upon the photograph they would be insulting the prince himself. Turning to the Maharaja, the Swami drove home his point, "See, Your Highness", he said, "though this is not you in one sense, in another sense it is you. It has a shadow of you; it brings you into their minds. One glance at it makes them see you in it. Therefore, they look upon it with as much respect as they do upon your own person. Thus, it is with the devotees who worship stone gods and metal images of gods and goddesses." There could have been no better way of using reason to controvert the logic based on material reality that lay behind the objection to idol worship. The Swami

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then went on to expound the doctrine of *Ishta Devatha*, the help rendered by idol worship to concentrate on the special attributes of divinity that the devotees have in mind, and the falsity of the belief that what the Hindu was worshipping was stone or metal, while what he was really worshipping was the spirit of which it was a symbol. And he declared, "Every one is worshipping, O Maharaja, the same one God, who is the Supreme Spirit, the Soul of Pure Knowledge. And God appears to all even according to their understanding and their representation of Him." *Ekam Sat Vipra Bahudhah Vadanti.* "God is one, though wise men speak of Him in different ways." This ancient scriptural text from the *Rig Veda*, the Swami would repeat on many occasions in later years, both in India and abroad. The foundations of secularism, not in the sense of non-belief in God but, in that of respect for all religions, which now is enshrined in our Constitution, were truly laid by the wandering monk as a part of the Master's message.

The Maharaja of Alwar, Shri Mangal Singh, became his devoted admirer. After a stay of seven weeks the Swami felt his wanderlust again and left for Jaipur first on foot and then by train. At Jaipur he met Sardar Hari Singh, the Commander-in-Chief of that State, who being a strong *Vedantin*, did not believe in images; and discussion failed to convince him, as indeed it had happened to himself in the past with Sri Ramakrishna. One evening, when they were out on a walk and saw some devotees carrying the image of Sri Krishna and singing devotional songs, the Swami touched Hari Singh and said, "Look there, see the living God." And Hari Singh saw and went into ecstasy. Returning to normal, he told the Swami, "What I could not understand after hours of discussion was easily comprehended by your touch." The Swami was exercising the power of spirituality that had been transmitted

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to him by his Master before he passed away into *Mahasamadhi.*

During his stay in Jaipur the Swami gave some more evidence of the skills which he had learnt from his Master in dealing with seemingly tough questions on Hindu philosophy. Before leaving Jaipur, a learned Pandit,who claimed to be a convinced *Vedantin* and wanted to embarrass the Swami, asked him, "We are all *Brahman.* What is the difference between me and an *Avatar*?" The Swami replied: "Yes, The Hindus count fish, tortoise and boar as incarnations. You say that you are also an *Avatar.* But with which of these do you feel yourself as one?" The encounter ended with laughter silencing the Pandit. It is reminiscent of the story the Master had told of the young *Vedantin* who tried to embrace a mad elephant under the belief that it was his brother because all were *Brahman,* and the need for injecting common-sense and not literalness into the interpretation of the *Advaita* concept.

From Jaipur, the Swami went to Ajmere and then to Mount Abu. There he lived in a forlorn cave practising austerities and meditation, and talking to devoted followers with whom he used to walk in the evening. The Muslim *vakil* of a local prince became attached to him and when the rainy season was approaching, invited him to stay with him at his bungalow. The Muslim *vakil* promised to make separate arrangements for his food. The Swami brushed this aside and moved to the bungalow. There he met the private secretary to the Maharaja of Khetri who insisted on taking him to his prince. The Swami met the Maharaja who was so impressed that he invited him to go with him to Khetri. The Swami agreed and the resulting association is one of the heart-warming episodes in his career. The Maharaja became a dedicated admirer and the Swami had to initiate him as his disciple. He spent several weeks at the palace teaching him not only philosophy

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but inducing him to take interest in scientific training and research for the development of the country. One of the few instances of the Swami granting a personal favour was his agreeing to the Maharaja's request for blessing that a son may be born to him. When the son was born, the Swami had to return to Khetri to bless the child and participate in the celebrations of rejoicing at his birth.

Soon the Swami felt that he was again getting attached and should resume his wanderings. Taking leave of the grief-stricken prince, he proceeded to Ahmedabad. There he enjoyed seeing the beautiful Jain temples and the glorious mosques and tombs, and then proceeded to Wadhwan. From Wadhwan he went to Limbdi, Bhavnagar, Sehore and Junagadh. It was at Junagadh that he renewed his mental energy by practising meditation in a solitary cave in Mount Girnar. Then he went on to Bhuj, Veraval, and Somnath Patan, where he visited the Somnath temple. During his long sojourn in Rajasthan and Saurashtra, he met many rulers and their top officials with whom he discussed not spiritual matters as much as the industrial, agricultural and economic problems of India and the need for spreading education among the masses. At Porbandar, he spent 11 months helping its *Dewan*, Pandit Shankar Pandurang, to translate the *Vedas*, while he finished reading Patanjali's *Mahabhashya* (the great commentary on Panini's grammar), and also started learning French. It was at Porbandar that the idea first came to him to go to the west to give them the message of his Master. It was Pandit Shankar Pandurang who told him: "Swamiji, I am afraid you cannot do much in this country, you ought to go to the west where people will understand you and your worth. Surely you can throw a great light on eastern culture by preaching the *Sanatan Dharma*." The Swami's long tour had strengthened his pride in India's heritage but had also

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made him actually aware of the degradation in which his people had fallen. He felt that to raise India in the estimation of the world he should first preach the glories of *Sanatan Dharma* to the west. Convinced that India's future lay in her spiritual redemption, he felt it would be useful to get an endorsement of India as the Mother of Religions and the fountain-head of spirituality from the west, whose alien culture and display of power had mesmerised his countrymen so much. Some time however was to elapse before the idea assumed concrete shape.

From Porbandar he went to Dwarka, holy with the memories and legends of Sri Krishna, but now in ruins. Agonised at the sight, he sat in a room in the Sarada *Math*, founded by Sri Sankaracharya, and got comfort from the vision he saw of a bright future for his beloved country. He then went to Mandvi where Akhandananda who had been following him from Delhi joined him. The two spent a fortnight together after which the Swami dismissed him and resumed his lonely journey. Narayan-sarovar, then Ashapuri, back to Mandvi, and then to Bhuj and Palitana—these formed his itinerary. Then he went to Baroda, Indore and Khandwa. It was at Khandwa that he told a local friend about the forthcoming Parliament of Religions at Chicago, adding, "If some one can help me with the passage money, all will be well and I shall go."

From Khandwa, the Swami went to Bombay towards the end of July 1892. After spending a few weeks there, he went to Poona where he was the guest of Bal Gangadhara Tilak. He then went to Kolhapur and proceeded from there to Belgaum. Some notes have been kept of his Belgaum visit by Prof. G.S. Bhate, the son of his host in Belgaum, and by Babu Haripade Misra with whom the Swami stayed for nine days. From these we learn of the astonishment he created not only by the difference he exhibited

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in clothing and food habits from the traditional monks with whom they were familiar but also by his proficiency in English, his mastery over Sanskrit and the Hindu scriptures, his imperious personality, his skill and patience as a teacher, and his vast knowledge of secular literature. Under his guidance, Haripade Misra grasped the relationship of the *Gita* to daily life and also learnt to appreciate the works of Thomas Carlyle and the novels of Jules Verne and Charles Dickens. During his speeches at Belgaum, the Swami would talk of the identity of purpose between science and religion in the quest for Truth, attack fanaticism and reactionary social customs, and go on to talk with sorrow of the sad condition of the villages which he had seen during his tour. Before leaving, he told Misra about his intention to sail for America to attend the Parliament of Religions in Chicago. When his delighted host wanted to raise a subscription for financing the trip, the Swami for reasons best known to himself dissuaded him from doing so.

From Belgaum the Swami went to Bangalore where he met the *Dewan* of Mysore, Sir K. Seshadri Iyer, and was his guest for three to four weeks. Seshadri Iyer was so impressed by his spirituality that he said, "He must have been a born knower of religion, otherwise how could he at such a young age have gained all this knowledge and insight?" He introduced him to the Maharaja, Sri Chamarajendra Wadiyar. The Swami now became the guest of the State and spent considerable time closeted with the Maharaja. One day the Maharaja called him to his apartments and the *Dewan* accompanied the Swami. Then the Maharaja asked, "Swamiji, what can I do for you?" The Swami replied by talking of India's philosophical and spiritual wealth but lack of modern scientific ideas, his feeling that it was India's duty to share her wealth with the people of the west, and that he himself intended

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going to America to preach the *Vedanta* gospel. The Maharaja immediately promised to defray his travelling expenses. Again, the Swami refused for reasons not known to his biographers. On leaving Bangalore, the Swami refused the Maharaja's offer of rich presents, but, on the Maharaja's insistence that he should accept some gift, chose a non-metallic hookah. The *Dewan* pressed him to take a large bundle of currency notes but the Swami refused and was content with a second class ticket to Trichur to which place he was now proceeding. From Trichur he went to Trivandrum where he stayed with Prof. Sundararama Iyer. Reporting on his stay in Trivandrum, Mr S.K. Nair writes: "He had the wonderful faculty of answering many men and many questions at the same time. It might be a talk on Spencer or some thought of Shakespeare or Kalidasa, Darwin's theory of evolution, Jewish history, growth of Aryan civilisation, the *Vedas*, Islam or Christianity—whatever the question, the Swami was ready with an appropriate answer." His local host, Prof, Sundararama Iyer relates an incident typical of the Swami's concern for others over that for himself. When he came to his house accompanied by a Muslim peon who had been sent to escort him from Trichur, he insisted on the peon being served first with food, though he himself had taken nothing but a little milk during the previous two days. Prof. Iyer found the Swami most liberal in his views. Though he was not for violating the injunction given by the *Shastras*, he insisted on preserving their original purport and strongly objected to the surrender of substance to form. Thus he held that the Brahmin would continue to survive as Brahmin so long as he did unselfish work and freely gave of his knowledge to the rest of the population. He wanted both women and the lower castes to receive Sanskrit education, realise in practice the spiritual ideals of the *rishis*, and solve all questions regarding their status in the light of

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this knowledge and the enlightened perception of their own needs and requirements. He also maintained that the Brahmins were as much a mixed race as the rest of mankind and that their traditional belief in their racial purity was largely founded on fiction. Obviously his was a modern mind, but this did not prevent him from admiring ancient Indian scriptures or from preaching on their message. The interpretation he gave, however, was in the new light given by his Master's teachings and not that of his tradition-bound predecessors.

From Trivandrum, the Swami went on to Rameshwaram, stopping on the way at Madurai to meet the Raja of Ramnad, Bhaskara Setupati, to whom he had a letter of introduction. The Raja urged the Swami to attend the Parliament of Religions to be held at Chicago and use the occasion to draw the world's attention to the spiritual wealth of India. He also promised to help him. The Swami told him that he would let him know his decision later and left for Rameshwaram. After worshipping at the famous Shiva temple there, he left for Kanyakumari, the southernmost tip of India, thus completing his great pilgrimage, extending from the Himalayas in the north to Kanyakumari in the south. After worshipping at the Kanyakumari temple, he crossed to a rock that was separate from the mainland. It is this rock, which is now known to history as the Vivekanands Rock, on which a great memororial has been erected to his name. It was when he sat on this rock, and brooded, reflected, and meditated on his beloved country, that he got the enlightenment that gave him his subsequent mission and place in Indian history. The account that follows of what happened there is based almost wholly on the inspired version given by his biographers and is given in quotes, though I have altered the sequence of sentences to make it briefer and more effective.

"About him the ocean tossed and stormed, but in his mind

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there was even a greater tempest. And there, sitting on the last stone of India, he passed into a deep meditation upon the present and future of his country. He sought for the root of her downfall; and, with the vision of a seer, he understood why India had been thrown from the pinnacle of glory to the depths of degradation. Everywhere and at all times he saw that the poor and the lowly had been oppressed and downtrodden for hundreds of years by every power that had come in the changes of fortune to rule them. The autocracy of priesthood, the despotism of caste, the terrible demarcations that these created within the social body, making the majority of the followers of *Dharma* the outcasts of the earth—these the Swami saw as almost insurmountable barriers to the progress of the Indian nation. His heart throbbed with the great masses; he seemed to have entered, in some supreme mode of feeling, that world of India's outcasts and poverty-stricken millions. In their sufferings he found himself sharing, at their degradation he found himself humiliated, in their lot his great heart longed to share. Agony was in his soul when he thought how those who prided themselves on being the custodians of *Dharma* had held down the masses for ages upon ages. He thought not of Bengal or of Maharashtra, or of the Punjab, but of India and its very life. All the centuries were arranged before him, and he perceived the realities and potentialities of Indian culture. He saw the whole of India organically and synthetically, as a great master-builder sees the whole architectural design. He saw religion as the very blood and life and spirit of India's millions. He found that religion was not the cause of India's downfall, but the fact that true religion was nowhere followed, for religion when dynamic was the most potent of all power." In a letter penned many months later on this experience, after referring to his all-night vigil sitting on the last bit of Indian rock and brooding over the poverty and ignorance among the masses

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that he found all over India, he wrote: "The poor are too poor to come to schools and *pathasalas*; and they will gain nothing by reading poetry and all that sort of thing. We as a nation have lost our individuality, and that is the cause of all mischief in India. We have to give back to the nation its lost individuality and raise the masses. The Hindu, the Mohammedan, the Christian, all have trampled them underfoot. We are so many *sanyasins* wandering about, and teaching the people metaphysics—it is all madness. Did not our *Gurudeva* used to say, 'An empty stomach is no good for religion?' That those poor people are leading the life of brutes is simply due to ignorance. We have for all ages been sucking their blood and trampling them underfoot. Suppose some disinterested *sanyasins*, bent on doing good to others, go from village to village disseminating education and seeking in various ways to better the condition of all down to the *Chandala*, through oral teaching, and by means of maps, cameras, globes and such other accessories —can't that bring forth good in time? All these plans I cannot write out in this short letter."

Here at Kanyakumari was the culmination of days and days of thought on the problems of the Indian masses; here was the culmination of hours of longing that the wrongs of the masses might be righted. His eyes looked through a mist of tears across the great waters. His heart went out to the Master and to the Mother in a great prayer. From this moment his life was consecrated to the service of India, but particularly to the outcast *Narayanas*, to the starving *Narayanas*, to the millions of oppressed *Narayanas* of his land. To him, in this wonderful hour, even the final vision of *Brahman* in the *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* and the bliss thereof became subservient to the overwhelming desire to give himself utterly and entirely for the good of the Indian people. And his soul was caught up in an ecstasy of vision of the *Narayana Himself*—the Supreme Lord of the Universe, whose love is boundless, whose pity knows

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no distinction between the high and the low, the pure and the vile, the rich and the poor. To him religion was no longer an isolated province of human endeavour; it embraced the whole scheme of things, not only the *Dharma*, the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the meditation of sages, the asceticism of great monks, the vision of the Most High, but the heart of the people, their lives, their hopes, their misery, their poverty, their degradation, their sorrows and their woes. And he saw that the *Dharma*, and even the *Vedas*, without the people, were as so much straw in the eyes of the Most High. Verily, at Kanyakumari, the Swami was the Patriot and Prophet in one!

No wonder that he spoke of himself to one of his beloved western disciples in later years as "A condensed India".

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VI

Vivekananda Takes Vedanta Abroad

FROM KANYAKUMARI, the Swami proceeded on foot to Pondicherry where several young men became his admirers and invited him to their houses. It was there that in reply to an orthodox Hindu Pandit, who went on wildly contradicting his progressive religious and social ideas, that the Swami gave his first public reaction to the revelation he had received at Kanyakumari. What he told the Pandit is worth quoting.

"Upon every educated Indian devolves the responsibility of submitting the contents of Hindu *Dharma* to the test. For this reason we must come out of the limited grooves of the past and take a look at the world as it moves onwards to progress at the present day. And if we find that there are hidebound customs which are impeding the growth of our social life or disturbing our philosophical outlook, it is time for us to advance a step by eschewing them."

The Swami then spoke about the uplift of the masses, and said that the time was at hand when the *Shudras* would arise and demand their rights and privileges. He insisted that it was the duty of educated Indians to help the downtrodden masses by giving them education, to spread the ideal of social equality, and to root out the tyranny of priestcraft and the evils of national disorganisation, which the perversion of the caste system and of the higher

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principles of religion had brought on.

From Pondicherry, he went to Madras with Mr. Manmatha Nath Bhattacharya, whom he had met when walking from Rameshwaram and who had invited him to be his guest. It was in Madras that the Swami found the first massive intellectual response that he had longed for, even as his Master in the past had longed for young men who would understand and propagate his ideas. A dozen or more of fine young men of Madras became his disciples, which gave him the confidence that his mission would be successful. It was again at Madras that he secured the funds which enabled him to go to America. After Calcutta, Madras is the next most important milestone in the Swami's life and work.

At a party arranged in his honour, a group of intellectuals challenged the Swami's espousal of the *advaita* creed and asked him how he could check himself from doing wrong if he was one with God. Back came the reply, "If I honestly believe that I am one with God, I shall abominate vice and no check is needed." That becoming one with *Brahman* was not just a matter of practising austerities and getting visions was something the Swami had seen and realised in the life of his Master. To be with God was also to become god-like; and it was this which made him such a staunch advocate of making religion the dynamic force for India's regeneration.

The Swami held several discussions at the Literary Society of Triplicane where he had made his first public debut before the intellectuals of Madras. Finding some ardent social reformers among its younger members, he cautioned them against the assimilation of irreligious foreign culture and asked them to take the aid of all that was relevant in the Indian heritage to effect the needed reforms in contemporary Indian society. The Swami was a great believer in continuity and in a constructive use of the past for changing the present, instead of condemning the entire Indian ethos and building

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anew on the debris created by completely destroying the society inherited from the past.

The Swami was now gathering an increasing number of followers, his warm and emotional personality captivating their hearts even as his ideas won their intellects. Speaking of the impression created on him by the Swami, Mr. K. Vyasa Rao, a well-known journalist of Madras, writes: "A graduate of the Calcutta University with a shaven head, a prepossessing appearance, wearing the garb of renunciation, fluent in English and Sanskrit, with uncommon powers of repartee who sang 'with full-throated ease' though he was attuning himself to the spirit of the universe, and withal a wanderer on the face of the earth! The man was sound and stalwart, full of sparkling wit, with nothing but a scathing contempt for miracle-working agencies . . . ; one who enjoyed good dishes, knew how to appreciate the *hookah* and the pipe, yet harped on renunciation with an ability that called forth admiration, and a sincerity that commanded respect. The young Bachelors and Masters of Arts were at their wits' end at the sight of such a phenomenon. But everything else apart, what endeared him to all was the unalloyed fervour of his patriotism. The young man, who had renounced all worldly ties and freed himself from bondage, had but one love, his country; and one grief, its downfall. These sent him into reveries which held his hearers spell-bound." The Swami also confounded his listeners by his knowledge of the philosophic and scientific achievements of the west. One who was himself a man of learning and later became his disciple writes this about the Swami: "The vast range of his mental horizon perplexed and enraptured me. From the *Rig-Veda* to *Raghuvamsha*, from metaphysical flights of the *Vedanta* philosophy to modern Kant and Hegel, the whole range of ancient and modern literature and art and music and morals, from the sublimities of ancient *Yoga* to the intricacies of a modern laboratory—everything seemed clear to his field of vision. It was

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this which confounded me, made me his slave."

Meanwhile the Swami had started telling people about his intention of going to the west to give them the message of India. His followers were thrilled and raised some funds to the tune of 500 rupees. When the Swami saw the money he grew nervous and started questioning himself whether his proposed trip to the west was merely his own desire or whether it had a deeper meaning. He had to get the Divine Mother's verdict on the matter. And he told the astonished disciples that unless the Mother proved to him that it was Her will that he should go, he would not do so. And he asked them to distribute the money among the poor, saying, "If it be Her will then the money will come again of itself." Almost as if in answer to his doubts, there came to him an invitation from Hyderabad to visit that city. And he reached there on February 10, 1893 to be met at the station by some 500 people assembled to receive him, including some of the cream of Hyderabad society, both Hindus and Muslims. There he met Nawab Bahadur Khurshid Jah, brother-in-law of the Nizam, who was noted for his religious tolerance and had visited many Hindu places of pilgrimage. The Nawab was so impressed by the Swami's discussion on the *Vedanta* that he offered him 1000 rupees to help him in his projected mission to the west. The Swami declined the offer, saying that he would ask for it when he actually embarked on the mission. He met the Prime Minister of Hyderabad, Sir Ashmen Jah, on the 13th and also Maharaja Krishna Bahadur and Maharaja Shiv Raj Bahadur and all the three promised their support for his proposed mission to the west. The same afternoon, the Swami delivered a public lecture at the Mahboob College on "My Mission to the West." This was his first public utterance on the subject. His eloquence came as a revelation to his audience. Promises of support flowed in but the Swami was still not prepared to cash in on them. He left Hyderabad on February 17, with more than 1000 persons coming to the railway station to bid him farewell.

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At Madras he was received with an ovation at the station by his numerous disciples. And he continued with his religious discourses and conversations to an ever-increasing number of devotees and disciples in that city.

The Swami was now becoming keen on going to America. He had lost his diffidence about his ability to sway large assemblies after his performance at the Mahboob College. But he had not yet received any direct evidence of the Divine Mother's attitude, though the spontaneous support that was emerging for his American mission gave him the feeling that She must be in favour. But he would not be satisfied with anything less than a direct indication. Meanwhile his disciples took definite steps to raise funds for his passage to America and went to Mysore, Ramnad and Hyderabad for the purpose besides tackling their own city. The subscription committee was headed by Alasinga Perumal, a devoted follower, who literally went begging from door to door. The Swami however was still undecided. Then he got the indication he was waiting for of the Divine Mother's will. He saw his Master in a dream, walking from the sea-shore into the waters of the ocean, and beckoning him to follow. He awoke and found himself filled with a great peace and joy. All his doubts and misgivings had left him; and he was convinced that his mission to America was actually a command from the Divine Mother. He now wrote to the Holy Mother, Sarada Devi, and received her blessings.

Just when all the arrangements were made for his sailing, the private secretary to the Maharaja of Khetri turned up in Madras with an urgent and pressing request to the Swami to go to Khetri and participate in the festivities attending upon the birth of a son to the ruler. The Swamiji could not resist the importunities of his disciple. So he went to Khetri and was received by the Maharaja prostrating himself before the Swami in the presence of all the guests who had gathered to participate in the festivities. The Swami's stay

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in Khetri was marked by an incident that left a deep impress on his mind and reminded him about the need for an *advaitin* to be constantly on guard about practising what he preached. One evening, the Maharaja being entertained with music by a rustic nautch-girl sent a request to the Swami to join him. But the Swami declined on the ground that as a *sanyasin* he could not come. The singer, who was told this, was deeply grieved and sang, as though in reply, Surdas's famous song

"O Lord, look not upon my evil qualities !
Thy Name, O Lord, is Samesightedness,
One piece of iron is in the Image in the Temple,
And another, the knife in the hand of the butcher,
But when they touch the philosopher's stone,
Both alike turn to gold,
So Lord, look not upon my evil qualities !"

The Swami realised that he had forgotten the basic tenet of *Advaita* that the same Divinity is in all beings; and he joined the party. Speaking of this incident later, the Swami added: "That incident removed the scales from my eyes. Seeing that all indeed are the manifestation of the One, I could no longer condemn anybody."

The Swami then left for Bombay accompanied by the Prince's private secretary who had instructions to pay the expenses of his journey and do everything necessary for his voyage to America. He had also assumed the name of Vivekananda at the instance of the Maharaja and retained it for the rest of his life. At the Abu Road station he was met by Swami Brahmananda and Swami Turiyananda. Recalling his memories of this meeting later, Swami Turiyananda said: "I vividly remember some remarks made by Swamiji at that time. The exact words and accents, and the deep pathos with which they were uttered still ring in my ears. He said, 'Haribhai, I am still unable to understand anything of your so-called religion'. Then with an expression of deep sorrow in

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his countenance and an intense emotion shaking his body. he placed his hand on his heart and added: 'But my heart has expanded very much, and I have learnt to feel. Believe me, I feel intensely indeed." His voice was choked with feeling; he could say no more. For a time, profound silence reigned, and tears rolled down his cheeks."

The Swami was met at Bombay by Alasinga Perumal who had come from Madras to bid him farewell. Thanks to the Maharaja of Khetri and the Madras friends led by Alasinga perumal, the Swami was now supplied with the clothing and equipment needed for a foreign journey, and presented with a handsome purse and a first-class ticket on *S.S. Peninsular* of the P&O Company. And he sailed for the United States on May 31, 1893. The journey that was to take him away from the country for three long years had begun.

The boat passed through Colombo, Penang, Hongkong, Nagasaki, Kobe, Yokohama and Vancouver. From Vancouver he went to Chicago by train. At every place the steamer halted, Vivekananda would go and see all the sights and observe the people and their customs. He was highly impressed by the cleanliness, patriotism and spirit of self-reliance of the Japanese people. He now got a much clearer perspective of his own country and was reinforced in his belief that what had brought degeneration to his country was the social system that disregarded and suppressed the masses. He wrote to his Madras disciples: "How many men, unselfish thorough-going men, is Madras ready to supply, to struggle unto the death to bring about a new state of things—sympathy for the poor, bread for their mouths, enlightenment to the people at large, who have been brought to the level of beasts by the tyranny of your forefathers?" His perception of what his country needed had been intensified by the modernity and organisation of public life he saw in other lands. And his enthusiasm for modern science

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and technology was strengthened by what he saw at the Chicago World Fair which he visited.

Vivekananda had now arrived in Chicago. He soon found that the Parliament of Religions was not to open till sometime in September. He had come too early and his funds were getting exhausted. Being told that Boston would be cheaper, he thought of living there during the intervening period and left for Boston. A fellow passenger, Miss Kate Sanborn, was highly impressed by his personality and learning, and invited him to stay at her house, "Breezy Meadows" near Boston. There he met Prof. J.H. Wright, Professor of Greek in Harvard University, to whom he explained his difficulties in attending the Parliament of Religions without the credentials which he found its organisers required from all participants. Prof. Wright wrote to the Chairman of the Committee on the selection of delegates, who was his friend, stating, "Here is a man who is more learned than all our learned professors put together." He also presented him with a ticket to Chicago and gave him letters of introduction to the Committee in charge of hospitality for the delegates. Unfortunately, Vivekananda lost the address of the Chairman of the Committee, Dr. Barrows, and could not get directions as the passers-by seemed mostly to know only German, and at last lay down in a huge empty box in the railroad freightyard, trusting to the Lord for fulfilment of his mission. Arising next morning he walked on without direction and found himself in the fashionable residential area on the Lake Shore Drive. As he was extremely hungry, he followed the practice of the true *sanyasin* and begged for food from house to house, also asking for directions for reaching the Parliament Committee's office. He suffered rude treatment at some houses, while at others he was insulted by servants and the doors slammed in his face. Thoroughly exhausted, he sat down quietly by the roadside, again throwing himself on the mercy of the Lord. Soon after this, the door of a fashionable house

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opposite to where he was sitting opened, a regal looking lady came out and asked him, "Sir, are you a delegate to the Parliament of Religions?" After hearing his difficulties, she invited him to her house and promised to take him to the office of the Parliament of Religions herself after he had his breakfast. This was Mrs. George W. Hale; and she and her husband and children became his warmest friends. Vivekananda was now convinced that the Lord was with him and would be guiding him in his mission.

The Parliament of Religions opened at the Art Institute, Chicago, on Monday, September 11th, with an address by its President, Dr. Barrows. There were seated on the platform representatives of many religions headed by Cardinal Gibbons of the Roman Catholic Church. A number of Indians were also there, Mazumdar and Chakravarti of the Brahmo Samaj, Gandhi respresenting the Jains, and Annie Besant representng Theosophy. There were of course no orthodox Hindus and the only *sanyasin* present was Vivekananda. Vivekananda did not have a prepared address to deliver when called upon to speak. With a brief mental prayer to Goddess Saraswati, he rose and began addressing his audience as "Sisters and Brothers of America". These simple words evoked an outburst of enthusiasm that was fantastic. Hundreds rose to their feet with shouts of applause. The Parliament had gone mad, everyone was cheering. For full two minutes the applause continued, making Vivekananda pause before continuing. It is difficult to explain the phenomenon. Partly no doubt it was the simplicity of these words in summing up the whole motif which had drawn together people of different religions, but more than that, it was some kind of electric magnetism that the Swami's very presence had exercised on the audience. The Divine Mother had certainly blessed his mission, thought Vivekananda, and the Master's power was being made manifest through him. But he did not speak of the Master. Instead he went back to the original and basic truths of Hinduism,

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illustrating how Hinduism was itself a Parliament of Religions and held in equal esteem different paths to God adumbrated by different religions. He had learnt these truths from his Master who had actually realised them by experience.

Let me now quote some extracts from this historic address, which opened western eyes to the spiritual wealth of this country:

"I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true. I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth. I am proud to tell you that we have gathered in our bosom the purest remnant of the Israelites, who came to Southern India and took refuge with us in the very year in which their holy temple was shattered to pieces by Roman tyranny. I am proud to belong to the religion which has sheltered and is still fostering the remnant of the Grand Zoroastrian nation."

He then quoted an ancient hymn from the Hindu scriptures that he had been reciting from his earliest boyhood:

"As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to thee."

Welcoming the Convention as vindication of the tenets of the *Bhagavad Gita* regarding the One Goal which all religions, however different, were really in search of, he concluded: "Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often and often with human blood, destroyed civilization and sent whole nations to despair. Had it not been for those horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now. But their time has come; and I fervently hope that the bell that tolled

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this morning in honour of this Convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal."

Thus was proclaimed before the world the basic Hindu doctrine of respect of all religions, which later was to take the modern appellage of secularism and get enshrined in the Indian Constitution.

The rest of the sessions of the Parliament of Religions was a personal triumph for Swami Vivekananda. He expounded the *Advaita* doctrine and held that Hinduism stood for the Universal in this respect. The overwhelming spirit of his address was the sense of oneness. He proclaimed his disbelief in the branding of men as sinners and instead quoted the ancient Rishis to call men the children of immortal bliss, possessed of the power to evolve into divinity. He showed his disdain for dogmas and theology that led to quarrels in the name of religion, and proclaimed that religion meant realisation. Asserting that "contradictions came from that same truth adapting itself to the varying circumstances of different natures, but in the heart of everything the same truth reigns", he made his audience, who consisted of men of differing faiths, see the oneness of Truth and the oneness of all religious realisations.

Vivekananda also took the opportunity to speak on India's contemporary problems and said that not religion but economic development was the crying need of his country. Though he came to preach religion abroad he could not be unmindful of the poverty at home. The audience saw that the man who stood before them was not only a prophet but also a patriot.

In his concluding address at the final session on the 27th, Vivekananda gave to the Parliament of Religions illustrations of every religious system having produced men and women of the most exalted character and asserted boldly: "If in the face of this evidence, if anybody dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and

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the destruction of the others, I pity him from the bottom of my heart, and point out to him that upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of his resistance, 'Help and not Fight', 'Assimilation and not Destruction', 'Harmony and Peace and not Dissension." .

Contemporary evidence fully bears out the extraordinary success that attended Vivekananda's participation in the Parliament of Religions. Leading newspapers wrote eloquently about his contribution, the *New York Herald* commenting, "He is undoubtedly the greatest figure in the Parliament of Religions. After hearing him we feel how foolish it is to send missionaries to this learned nation." On Vivekananda himself, however, the reactions were different. On the very night of his triumph he wept like a child realising that this meant the end of his free life as an unknown monk and that from now on he had to wear the name and fame which he had always scorned. Another night, after being entertained right royally and given a princely room with luxury fitted beyond his imagining, he could not sleep pondering over India's plight. The pillow was wet with his tears. Going to the window he stood peering at the darkness. Overwhelmed with sorrow and overcome by his emotion, he fell to the ground, crying out: "O Mother, what do I care for name and fame when my motherland remains sunk in utmost poverty! To what a sad pass have we poor Indians come when millions of us die for want of a handful of rice, and here they spend millions of rupees upon their personal comfort! Who will raise the masses in India! Who will give them bread? Show me, O Mother, how can I help them."

This was to be his mission, how to help all men rise to their heights by spiritual education, and how to alleviate the misery and sufferings of the poverty-stricken and illiterate masses of his own country. And to this end he devoted his energies during the rest of his stay in that country.

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With the fame he had now acquired in Chicago, the Swami found himself a national figure. A lecture bureau invited him to undertake a lecture tour of America. He accepted it not only as a way to broadcast his Master's message but also to clear the wrong ideas and erroneous impressions of his country and culture so prevalent in America. He also thought it would be a way to become financially independent and also raise funds for the work he had in mind for India. He visited the larger cities of most of the eastern and mid-western states, but his tour was not an unqualified success. In some places he was faced with irritating questions that showed complete ignorance of Hindu culture and Indian life. And then he would fall on his questioners like a thunderbolt, for the Swami was certainly not patient with small mindedness or fanaticism. At one of his lectures in Detroit he referred to the constant taunting about idolatry accompanied by extravagant praise of the good work the Christian missions were doing in India, and told them that Hindu culture taught his people to ignore these snipings. He thundered: "You train and educate and clothe and pay men to do what?—to come over to my country and curse and abuse all my forefathers, my religion and my everything. If all India stands up and takes all the mud that is at the bottom of the Indian Ocean and throws it up against the western countries, it will not be doing an infinitesimal part of that what you are doing to us. And what for? Did we send one missionary to convert anybody in the west? We say to you, 'You are welcome to your religion, but allow us to have ours. You are not Christians. No, as a nation, you are not. Go back to Christ. Go back to Him who had nowhere to lay His head ... Yours is a religion preached in the name of luxury. What an irony of fate! Reverse this if you want to live; reverse this. It is all hypocrisy that I have heard in this country. If this nation is going to live, let it go back to Him. You cannot serve God and Mammon at the same time. All this prosperity, all this from Christ. Christ would

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have denied all such heresies....If you can join these two, this wonderful prosperity with that ideal of Christ, it is well; but if you cannot better go back to Him and give up these vain pursuits. Better be ready to live in rags with Christ than to live in palaces without Him."

But all were not critics or detractors. He found many clergymen and distinguished laymen espousing his cause and answering his critics. But his forthright speeches were rousing the ire of zealous missionaries in India who also feared the drying up of their funds from America and started attacking him maliciously. But the Swami was not perturbed. In a letter to a disciple who wrote to him about this, he replied, "I pity them if their means of living fine lives in India is cut down by the influx of oriental religions here. But not one of their leading clergy is ever against me". He continued with his lectures, which were intensely religious and philosophical. But he soon found that the lecture bureau was defrauding him. He had also become disgusted with what he called "the nonsense of public life and newspaper blazoning". He therefore severed his connection with the lecture bureau and decided to be on his own, giving freely as the *Rishis* of his country had done in the ancient past.

Meanwhile he was making use of his travels to study the difference between western and Asiatic cultures and how the industrial and economic systems of the west could be applied in practical form for the uplift of his own people. He visited various museums, universities, institutions and art galleries. He saw the emancipation of western women in contrast to the seclusion of women in his own society. He saw much to admire; but he was not overwhelmed, for he also saw what they did not have which his own people had. So he conceived of the need of a balance between the western and eastern ways of life which he embodied in his lectures "The East and the West."

The Swami was encouraged by the news he received from India

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about the success of his American visit. His name became a household word in India, especially in Bengal and Madras, which had done so much to train him for his mission and encourage him to go abroad to preach his message. He received numerous public addresses of felicitations and personal messages of joy from his disciples and admirers in India. At a huge and representative meeting held in the town hall of Calcutta on September 5, 1894 resolutions were passed praising the Swami's services; and an appreciatory letter was addressed to him on their behalf from which is given the following extract:

"Hinduism has for the first time in its history, found a missionary, and by a rare good fortune it has found one so able and accomplished as yourself. Your fellow-countrymen, fellow-citizens, and fellow-Hindus feel that they would be wanting in an obvious duty if they did not convey to you their hearty sympathy and earnest gratitude for all your labours in spreading a true knowledge of their ancient faith. May God grant you strength and energy to carry on the good work you have begun!".

India had emerged as a force in America, not by the power of arms or of money, but by the power of the *Vedanta* and its inspired interpretation by Swami Vivekananda.

The Swami now had a very strenuous time. Invitations to speak poured in on him from different places and he readily accepted them all in his anxiety to spread his message to as many people as possible. He had to deliver 12 to 14 and sometimes even more lectures every week, and the strain was so great that he felt completely exhausted not only physically but also intellectually. He would often wonder what he could say in his lecture tomorrow and then he would hear at the dead of night a voice shouting to him the thoughts he was to voice on the morrow. Sometimes the voice would appear to come from alongside his bed. And he received ideas that he had never heard or thought of previously. Commenting upon these

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experiences to his more intimate disciples, he would stggest that they constituted what is called inspiration. He also felt extra-ordinary yogic powers developing spontaneously within him, though he rarely chose to exercise them.

After giving a series of lectures in the Unitarian Church at Detroit in February the Swami spent the months of March, April and May 1894 alternatively in Chicago, New York and Boston. During the mid-summer months he delivered a series of lectures at Greenacre in New England, and expounded the *Vedanta* philosophy to a group of earnest students as they sat in oriental fashion under an ancient pine tree since called "The Swami's Pine". There he met Dr. Lewis G Janes, President of the Brooklyn Ethical Association, who invited him to deliver a series of lectures on the Hindu Religion under the auspices of his association. The Swami accepted; and with that came the real beginning of his serious work in America.

The Swami was now breaking away from social functions. He wanted to build up a body of serious-minded disciples who could carry on his work when he returned to India. He now took up an independent residence of his own in New York and announced classes and lectures free of charge. Some of those who had heard him in Brooklyn now went to his residence to attend these classes in just an ordinary room on the second floor of a lodging house. The classes gained in numbers with astonishing rapidity and the overflow would fill the hall and spill over to the stairs. They were held nearly every morning and on several evenings every week. Some Sunday lectures were also given and there were question classes to help those who had difficulty in understanding the teachings which were so new to them. The classes began in February 1895 and lasted till June. By that time they had overgrown their small beginnings and shifted downstairs to occupy a whole parlour floor and extension. It was in this modest fashion that the Swami inaugurated the teaching of *Vedanta* philosophy in New York.

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He was reviving the traditional practice of the ancient *gurus* of India who gave of their knowledge without seeking any payment in return. Besides these talks and lectures, he chose some of his followers to give training in meditation. Watching them meditate he would sometimes drift into meditation himself and go into *samadhi* to come out of which involved the giving of special instructions. In fact, he had succeeded in creating in this distant land the same atmosphere of spirituality and ecstasy that had marked his Master's teachings at Dakshineshwar. As time went on, a number of his admirers and listeners became his followers in a definite sense. The classes were mainly concerned with *Raja Yoga* and *Jnana Yoga*. He taught his students the path of practical spirituality by the inner control of the senses, to still the mind, and subordinate the sense impulses to reason. Meditation was the key to spirituality and he taught the students how to meditate. The students learnt that religion was not just a question of belief and began under his guidance certain spiritual and physical exercises for establishing equilibrium of the body and the mind. He gave every disciple, in accordance with his nature, a special ideal and special form of meditation. He was anxious to initiate a few chosen disciples as *sanyasins* and train them so that they would be fit to carry on his work during his absence. He selected two, one a French woman, Madame Marie Louise, known to liberal circles as a materialist and a socialist, while the other was an Americanised Russian Jew, Leon Landsberg, a newspaper man employed on the staff of one of the most prominent New York papers. The former became Swami Abhayananda and the latter Swami Kripananda.

Among those devoted to the Swami's teachings may be mentioned Mrs Ole Bull, wife of the celebrated violinist and Norwegian nationalist, Dr. Allan Day, Miss S.E. Waldo, Prof. Wymen, Prof. Wright and many clergymen and laymen of note. Three well-known members of New York society, Mr. and Mrs. Francis Legget

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and Miss J. Macleod, became his intimate friends and helped him in many ways. Later, Madame Calve, the celebrated singer, became his ardent disciple.

By June 1895, the Swami had placed his work on a solid foundation. But he began to feel he was wearing himself out and longed for a brief period of rest and recuperation. In June 1895, therefore, he accepted the invitation of one of his disciples to go to Percy, New Haven, for a period of rest in the silence of its pine woods. His pupils begged him to return to New York after his holiday and teach through the summer months. The Swami was reluctant but may have given in from a sense of duty and with disastrous results on his failing health.

Fortunately, however, one of the students, Miss Dutcher offered her cottage in Thousand Island Park, the largest island in the St. Lawrence River; and built a new wing nearly as large as the original cottage for the use of her teacher. The place was ideally situated on high ground, overlooking a wide sweep of the beautiful river with many of its famous thousand islands. The new wing stood on the steep slope of the rocks like a great lantern tower with windows on three sides, three storeys deep at the back and two in front. The lower one was occupied by one of the students, while that over it being large and convenient became the class room. Over this room was the one devoted exclusively for the Swami's use. The upstairs piazza was used by the Swami for his evening talks, conversing with his pupils who sat silent in the darkness while he sat close by his own door. He always spent two hours with them and often much longer. And he spent seven weeks in all with them. Each day he took up some special subject or expounded from some sacred book like the *Bhagavad Gita* or the *Upanishads* or the *Vedanta Sutras* of Vyasa. It was during these talks that the Swami first spoke at length about Sri Ramakrishna and his daily life with the Master, including his own early disbelief and his eventual surrender.

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And every one of the students received initiation by *Mantra* at his hands, thus becoming his disciples. Two of them were initiated as *sanyasins* and five as *brahmacharins*.

Miss S.E. Waldo, one of his students, writes thus about those wonderful seven weeks:

"Oh, the sublime teaching of Vivekananda! No nonsense, no talk of 'astrals', 'imps'; but of God, Jesus, Buddha. I feel that I shall never be quite the same again for I have caught a glimpse of the Real. In his talks he may go over so far afield, but always he comes back to the one fundamental, vital thing—'Find God! Nothing else matters'. Swamiji's fun-making is of the merry type. Sometimes he will say, 'Now I am going to cook for you'. He is a wonderful cook and delights in serving the 'brethren'. The food he prepares is delicious but for 'yours truly' too hot with various spices; but I made up my mind to eat it if it strangled me, which it nearly did. If Vivekananda can cook for me, I guess the least I can do is to eat it. Bless him! At such times we have a whirlwind of fun. Swamiji will stand on the floor with a white napkin draped over his arm, *a la* the waiters on the dining cars, and will intone in perfect imitation their call for dinner—'Last call fo' the dining cah. Dinner served.' Irresistibly funny. And then, at table, such gales of laughter over some quip or jest, for he unfailingly discovered the little idiosyncrasies of each one—but never sarcasm or malice—just fun. We take long walks every afternoon, and our favourite walk is back of the cottage, down a hill and then a rustic path to the river. Sometimes we stop several times and sit around on the grass and listen to Swami's wonderful talks. A bird, a flower, a butterfly, will start him off, and he will tell us stories from the *Vedas* or recite Indian poetry. The last day has been a very wonderful and precious one. This morning there was no class. He asked C and me to take a walk as he wished to be alone with us. We went up a hill about half a mile away. All was woods and solitude.

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Finally he selected a low-branched tree, and we sat under the low-spreading branches- Instead of the expected talk, he suddenly said, 'Now we will meditate. We shall be like Buddha under the *Bo* Tree.' He seemed to turn to bronze, so still was he. Then a thunder storm came up and it poured. He never noticed it. I raised my umbrella and protected him as much as possible. Completely absorbed in his meditation he was oblivious of everything. Soon we heard shouts in the distance. The others had come out after us with raincoats and umbrellas. Swamiji looked around regretfully, for we had to go, and said, 'Once more am I in Calcutta in the rains?"

Yet another pupil, Miss Christine Greenstidel, later Sister Christine, writes of those days at Thousand Island Park: "Of the wonderful weeks that followed, it is difficult to write. Only if one's mind were lifted to that high state of consciousness in which we lived for the time could we hope to recapture the experiences. We were filled with joy. We did not know at that time that we were living in his radiance. On the wings of inspiration, he carried us to the height which was his natural abode. He himself, speaking of it later, said that he was at his best in Thousand Islands. Then he felt that he had found the channel through which his message might be spread, the way to fulfil his mission, for the *Guru* had found his own disciples. His first overwhelming desire was to show us the path to *Mukti*, to set us free. 'Ah', he said with touching pathos, 'If I could only set you free with a touch!' His second object, not so apparent perhaps, but always in the undercurrent, was to train this group to carry on the work in America. There was nothing set or formal about these nights on the upper verandah. He sat in his large chair at the end, near his door. Sometimes he went into a deep meditation. At such times we too meditated or sat in profound silence. Often it lasted for hours and one after the other slipped away. For we knew that after this he would not feel inclined to speak. Or again, the meditation would be short, and he would

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encourage us to ask questions afterwards, often calling on one of us to answer. No matter how wrong these answers were, he let us flounder about until we were near the truth, and then in a few words, he would clear up the difficulty. This was his invariable method in teaching. He knew how to stimulate the mind of the learner and make it do its own thinking. For the first time we understood why all religions begin with ethics. For without truth, non-injury, continence, non-stealing, cleanliness, austerity, there can be no spirituality."

Some of the talks he gave at the Thousand Island Park were taken down by Miss Waldo and embodied in book form with the title, "Inspired Talks". And truly they were inspired. There can be no doubt that these seven weeks were one of the freest and greatest periods in the Swami's life. It was there, on the banks of the River St. Lawrence, one day, he entered, while meditating, into the *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* as he had done earlier in Cossipore. Though he did not tell anyone about it at that time, he reckoned this experience as one of the most exalted in his life. No wonder that Sister Christine said of this period: "It is needless to repeat the formal teaching, the great central idea. These one can read for oneself. But here was something else, an influence, an atmosphere charged with the desire to escape from bondage—call it what you will—that can never be put into words, and yet was more powerful than any words. It was this which made us realise that we were blessed beyond words. To hear him say, 'This indecent clinging to life', drew aside the curtain for us into the region beyond life and death, and planted in our hearts the desire for that glorious freedom. We saw a soul struggling to escape the meshes of *Maya*, one to whom the body was an intolerable bondage, not only a limitation but a degrading humiliation. 'Azad, Azad, the Free', he cried, pacing up and down like a caged lion. Yes, like the lion in the cage who found the bars not of iron but of bamboo, 'let us not be caught this time', would be his

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refrain another day..The spiritual ecstasy that had swept the Master's devotees in Dakshineshwar swept here anew, but this time on the Swami's devotees in the island retreat of the St. Lawrence river, the spirit of the Master and the realisation of the Swami mingling in a constant flame as it were to destroy the ignorance of these fortunate few."

It was during the same year, which included these glorious weeks, that the Swami began longing for an organisation that would represent his ideas and aspirations. He was sick of the importance he was being given and the preaching he had constantly to undertake. Thus he wrote to one of his disciples to say that he was working out that great *Karma* that had fallen upon him and expressing the hope that the Lord would soon liberate him from the task of preaching. While he wrote to another: "I long, Oh, I long for my rags, my shaven head, my sleep under the trees, and my food from begging". Two months later and in another mood he writes: "That is why I desire so much to have a centre. Organisation has its faults, no doubt, but without that nothing can be done....One must work as the dictate comes from within, and then if it is right and good, society is bound to veer round, perhaps centuries after one is dead and gone...."

When the Swami talked of organisation, what he wanted was a spiritual association, a union of likeminded souls bent on seeking realisation and moved by a genuine interest in and love for humanity. Referring to this period of renewed realisation at the Thousand Island Park, he wrote to a friend: "I am free, my bonds are cut, what care I whether this body goes or does not go?....I have a truth to teach, I, the child of God. And He that gave me the truth will send me fellow-workers from the Earth's bravest and best." His hopes were to be fulfilled, as we shall see later, by the birth and growth of the Sri Ramakrishna Mission, both in India and abroad.

The Swami's triumphal progress in his mission was not however

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as smooth and undisturbed as it deserved. Some idea of the difficulties he encountered and the way he faced them is available from a letter written to the *Brahmavadin* in the following year by his American disciple, Swami Kripananda :

"At the time the American mind was coated with thick layers of superstition and bigotry that had come down from olden times; and there was no humbug, no charlatanry, no imposition which had not left there an impress extremely difficult to eradicate. The Americans are a receptive nation. That is why the country is a hotbed of all kinds of religious and irreligious monstrosities. There is no theory so absurd, no doctrine so irrational, no claim so extravagant, no fraud so transparent, but can find their numerous believers and a ready market. This morbid craving for the abnormal, the occult, the sensational, has practically brought about a revival of the Middle Ages. To satisfy this craving, to feed the credulity of the people, hundreds of societies and sects are born for the salvation of the world and to enable the prophets to pocket $ 25 to $ 100 initiation fees. Hobgoblins, spooks, *Mahatmas*, and new prophets were rising every day. In this bedlam of religious cranks, in this devil kitchen of fraud, imposture and knavery, the Swami appeared to teach the lofty religion of the *Vedas*, the profound philosophy of the *Vedanta*, the sublime wisdom of the ancient *Rishis*. Poor and friendless, with no other support than God and his love for mankind, he set patiently to work, determined not to give up until the message he had to deliver would reach the hearts of truth-seeking men and women. In the beginning, crowds of people flocked to his lectures, consisting partly of curiosity-seekers, partly of the representatives of the cranky and fradulent elements mentioned before, who thought they had found in the Swami a proper tool to forward their interests. Most of the latter type of persons tried to induce him to embrace their cause, first by promises of support, and then by threats of injuring him if he refused to ally himself with them. But

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they were all grievously disappointed. To all these propositions his only answer was, 'I stand on Truth. Truth will never ally itself with falsehood. Even if all the world should be against me Truth must prevail in the end.' He denounced fraud and superstition in whatever guise they appeared; and all those untrue and erratic existences hid themselves, like bats at the approach of daylight in their haunts, before this apostle of Truth."

When his Indian friends wrote to him indignantly about the criticism that the Christian missionaries were indulging in India on his life and work, he answered, "In future do not pay any heed to what people say either for or against....I shall work incessantly until I die, and even after death I shall work for the good of the world. Truth is infinitely more weighty than untruth;....It is the force of character, of purity and of truth, of personality. So long as I have these things you can feel easy; no one will be able to injure a hair of my head. If they try they will fail, sayeth the Lord...."

After he started his systematic work in New York, he urged his Madras disciples to launch a magazine for the propagation of *Vedanta* and also sent them some money from the proceeds of his secular lectures to enable them to do so. That was how the *Brahmavadin* came into existence. He also sent them suggestions about the lines on which the journal should be conducted. His letters were also full of his concern for the poor and his feeling that love of the poor was the same as the love of God.

The Swami now decided that the next country for the spread of his message was England. And he sailed from New York for London in mid-August 1895, stopping in Paris on his way. He was received in London by Mr. E. T. Sturdy and Miss Henrietta Miller whom he had met in America. After a few days' rest he commenced his work in a quiet way and began holding classes in *Vedanta* as he had done in New York. Soon his fame spread in the city and his friends arranged a public meeting in Prince's Hall, Piccadilly, on the evening of October 22. The lecture was a resounding success; and

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the audience thoroughly enjoyed his vigorous denunciation of western materialistic civilisation with its commercial prosperity, bloody wars and religious intolerance, and appreciated his declaration that "at such a price the wild Hindu would have none of this vaunted civilisation". He was interviewed by the Press and told the correspondent of the *Westminster Gazette* that he had come to London not to organise a new sect but to give a general outline of the universal principles of the *Vedanta* which each could apply to his own separate and individual religious faith.

Though his stay in London was just a little more than a month after this lecture, scores of people came to his residence seeking instruction and left deeply impressed. Among these was Miss Margaret Noble who subsequently became famous as Sister Nivedita. An intellectual and educationist of some standing and deeply interested in modern thought, it took her some time to accept the Swami's ideas. Once she had done so, she became an ardent devotee and developed into one of the most famous disciples of Vivekananda and an inspired exponent of his teachings. The Swami was immensely pleased with his reception in London. He had never expected that the English, of whom he had been so critical for their doings in India, would be so responsive to his ideas in their home country. He promised to return to England the following summer and advised his more devoted admirers to form themselves into a body and meet regularly for the purpose of reading the *Bhagavad Gita* and other Hindu scriptures. Writing in the *Brahmavadin* of February 1896, Mr. Sturdy, a dedicated disciple, referred to the Swami's influence in making some of the more open-minded English clergymen apply his Vedantic teachings to their own system of religion. Classes were formed as suggested by the Swami and Mr. Sturdy added, "These classes continue. No introduction is needed. No society is formed or will be formed nor is any money consideration accepted." Thus began the first fruits of the Swami's brief

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English mission.

The Swami now returned to America. During his absence his two American *sanyasin* disciples, Swami Kripananda and Swami Abhayananda had carried on his work, assisted by Miss Waldo. Regular weekly meetings on the *Vedanta* philosophy were held in New York and new centres were opened in Ruppolo and Detroit. The Swami arrived in New York on Friday, December 6, in excellent health and spirits. He started work immediately and this time concentrated on the teaching of *Karma Yoga*. The Swami was not given to writing as a rule and, except for the book on *Raja Yoga*, has left behind but little of his philosophical thoughts in writing. His disciples, who were eager to preserve his teachings, engaged a stenographer to report his lectures. The stenographer could not keep pace with his thoughts and left, and the same fate befell his successor. It was then that, almost as a miracle, J.J. Godwin, who had recently come to New York from England, was engaged as the Swami's stenographer. Not only did Godwin transcribe exactly and accurately all the utterances of the Swami, but he also became the Swami's most devoted disciple. He worked day and night, accompanied the Swami on his visits to different places in the United States, then to England, and finally to India where he died. The Swami called him his right hand. But for this Englishman, India and the rest of the world would not have been able to inherit the wealth of the thoughts and teachings with which the Swami had filled his lectures and conversations.

The Swami had grown so popular that his second set of public lectures had to be organised in the Madison Square Garden, New York's then largest and most famous hall. He concluded this series with an inspired lecture, "My Master, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa" which has now become a classic. During the same period, on Thursday, February 13, he initiated Dr. Street as his third *sanyasin* disciple giving

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him the name "Yogananda" and on the following Thursday administered *mantras* to several young men and women of New York. The secret of the Swami's success was in part due to his personality. But the more powerful reason was the non-factional character of his teachings. This is well illustrated by what the famous American poet, Ella Wheeler Wilcox, who heard him that year had to say on it 12 years later, when she wrote in the New York *American* of May 26, 1907: "We went out of curiosity....(The man whose name I bear and I), and before we had been 10 minutes in the audience, we felt ourselves lifted up into an atmosphere so rarefied, so vital, so wonderful, that we sat spellbound and almost breathless, to the end of the lecture.". She concluded: "Vivekananda came to us with a message.... 'I do not come to convert you to a new belief', he said, 'I want you to keep your own belief; I want to make the Methodist a better Methodist; the Presbyterian a better Presbyterian; the Unitarian a better Unitarian. I want to teach you to live the Truth, to reveal the light within your own soul.' He gave the message that strengthened the man of business, that caused the frivolous society women to pause and think; that gave the artist new aspirations; that imbued the wife and mother, the husband and father, with a larger and holier comprehension of duty." And Helen Huntingdon writes to the *Brahmavadin* from Brooklyn: "The Swami Vivekananda has preached to us the religion that knows no bounds of creed and dogmas, is uplifting, purifying, infinitely comforting and altogether without blemish—based on the love of God and man and on absolute charity." While, the *Hartford Daily Times* wrote: "His lectures are more in consonance with those of Christ than those of many so-called Christians. His broad charity takes in all religions and all nations."

The next incident of note in the Swami's life that year was the address he gave before the graduating class of the Philosophy Department of Harvard University on March 25, 1896. In this address,

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he dwelt on the cosmology and general principles of the *Vedanta*, showing the points of reconciliation between the theories of *Vedanta* and those of science concerning matter and energy. When asked by the Professors about what the Vedantic idea of civilisation was, he replied that true civilisation was the manifestation of divinity within man, and that land most civilised wherein the highest ideals were made practical. The University authorities were so impressed by his lecture and answers to questions that they offered him a Chair of Eastern Philosophy in their University. The Swami declined pleading that as a *sanyasin* he could not accept a paid position. Subsequently, the Columbia University offered him the Chair in Sanskrit which also he declined.

The Swami now consolidated his American work by founding the Vedantic Society of New York as a non-sectarian body for preaching and practising the *Vedanta* and applying its principles to all religions. He was planning to get some of his brother disciples from India to teach and preach in America. At the same time he thought of having some of his American and English disciples go to India and teach there. In America it would be religious teaching while in India it should be a practical teaching of science, industry, economics, applied sociology, organisation and co-operation. Before leaving New York, he made Mr. Francis H Leggett, President of the *Vedanta* Society, the other offices being occupied by his initiated disciples. The members of the society, knowing that the Swami would soon be returning home, urged him to get one of his *guru-bhais* from India to come and conduct classes and work in general during his absence. The Swami, who was proceeding to England before returning home, wrote definitely to Swami Saradananda to meet him in London.

Before he left America he had met Prof. William James of Harvard at dinner at the residence of Mrs.Ole Bull. The distinguished American philosopher was so impressed that he wrote him a letter

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the next day addressing him as "Master" and inviting him to dinner at his residence. In his classical work *The Variety of Religious Experience*, Prof. James specially refers to the Swami in connection with monastic mysticism; and spoke of him on many occasions as "that paragon of *Vedantists.*" The Swami also created a great impression by his knowledge of science and art, and amazed a group of scientists whom he met at dinner at the house of Prof. Elisha Grey, the electrical inventor, with his knowledge of electricity and his ready repartees on matters relating to science. The guests on the occasion included Sir William Thompson, later Lord Kelvin, Prof. Helmhotz and Aviton Hopitallia.

The Swami was thoroughly tired at the end of his American work and his friends feared a complete breakdown. But no serious illness intervened and he left New York for London on April 15, 1896.

When the Swami landed in London he found Swami Saradananda waiting for him. This was a matter of great joy for him as he had not seen any of his *gurubhais* since he had left India in 1893; and he drank in with avidity all the news that Saradananda brought him of the monastery in Alambazar and every one of his beloved fellow disciples. Refreshed by this meeting, the Swami re-commenced his work, teaching privately and preaching publicly. In the beginning of May 1896 he began his regular classes, this time concentrating on *Jnana Yoga* or the Path of Knowledge. He then gave three Sunday lectures in one of the galleries of the Royal Institute of Painters in Piccadilly. The subjects on which he spoke were: "The Necessity of Religion," "A Universal Religion" and "The Real and the Apparent Man." These lectures were so successful that another course was arranged in Prince's Hall from the end of June to the middle of July on Sunday afternoons, the subjects covered including *Bhakti Yoga*, "Renunciation" and " Realisation." Besides these, he held his classes on five days in the week with a question and answer class on Friday evening. Swami Saradananda,

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writing in the *Brahmavadin* of June 6, referred to the growing influence of the Swami and mentioned particularly his address on "Education", where he talked of the ancient educational system of India and the importance they attached to "man-making" instead of cramming. He also presided over a social conference of Indian residents in Great Britain and Ireland on July 18 and spoke eloquently on "The Hindus and their Needs. This visit was also notable for his meeting Prof. Max Muller, the veteran Indologist, who told the Swami that more should be done to make Sri Ramakrishna known to the world. Vivekananda was delighted and collected relevant material with the help of which Prof. Max Muller wrote his book, *Ramakrishna—His Life and Sayings*. The Swami and the Professor became fast friends and corresponded frequently with each other.

The Swami reached some of his highest spiritual moods during his stay in London and became filled with feelings of love and sympathy for everyone and everything. In a letter to Francis Leggett dated July 6, he wrote: "At 20 I was the most unsympathetic, uncompromising fanatic; I would not walk on the footpath on the theatre side of the streets of Calcutta. At 33, I can live in the same house with prostitutes and never would think of saying a word of reproach to them. Is it degenerate or is it that I am broadening out into the universal love which is the Lord Himself?....Some days I get into a sort of ecstasy. I feel I must bless everyone and everything, love and embrace everything and I do see that evil is a delusion." And then he breaks out into a mystic credo. "It is a funny world and the funniest chap you ever saw is He—the beloved Infinite. Fun, is it not? Brotherhood or playmatehood—a school of romping children, let out to play in this playground of the world. Isn't it? Whom to praise, whom to blame, it is all His play—I have learnt a thing or two; beyond reason and learning and talking is the feeling, the Love, The Beloved." The Swami had gone mad; but it was a divine madness, something like what St. Francis of

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Assissi had felt or what had taken possession of the Sufis of Islam. Only those could understand who had truly realised the Universal in themselves.

He had now started gathering English disciples, Miss Henrietta Miller, Miss Margaret Noble, Mr. E.T. Sturdy, and Mr. and Mrs. Sevier. The Seviers persuaded the Swami to take a holiday tour in Europe after his exhausting work in England. The first visit was to Switzerland. The Swami had always been fascinated by the Himalayas and now he found himself enchanted with the Swiss mountains. It was there that he gave expression to his desire to establish a monastery in the heart of the Himalayas and the Seviers who heard him were later to help him to do so.

From Switzerland the Swami went to Kiel on the invitation of the celebrated Orientalist, Prof. Paul Deussen. They found themselves very much at home with each other with their mutual interest in the *Upanishads*, the *Vedanta Sutras* and Sankaracharya's commentaries thereon, the Professor being completely won over by the vigour and lucid interpretations the Swami gave and with such delicacy of perception. When he could not persuade the Swami to stay longer —the Swami now quite refreshed wanted to resume his work in London—he decided to accompany him to London and stay there for some days to get more of the wisdom and knowledge of the *Vedanta* that the Swami possessed.

Back in London the Swami resumed his mission of spreading the knowledge of the *Vedanta*. And he did it by expounding both its practical and metaphysical aspects. In fact, his four lectures on "The Practical *Vedanta*" were a revelation to those who had failed to realise the implications of *Vedanta* philosophy on practical living. The Swami was anxious to complete a systematised treatment of his philosophy before he left for India, but could not do so. The idea of writing an integrated and comprehensive book on Hindu philosophy never left him, and even as late as January 1901—a year before his passing away—he told his disciples that he wanted to

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retire from public life and devote himself to writing in the serene atmosphere of the Mayavati Ashram. But that was not to be. And the world had to be content with his book on the *Raja Yoga* and the scripts of the many lectures and classroom lessons he gave made available by the stenographic records of the faithful Godwin.

By this time, Swami Saradananda, whom Vivekananda had sent to America, was establishing himself and making a great success of the mission that he had received from his senior brother disciple. And now Swami Abhedananda whom he had brought to London was beginning to do equally well. The Swami was now confident that the work he had begun would also develop further and his mind began increasingly to turn towards his own country. He longed to return home and start work in a systematic way in India. Mr. and Mrs. Sevier were to accompany him to help in his work and of course also Godwin who had indeed become the Swami's right hand. Miss Miller and Miss Noble were to come later, particularly to help in the education and uplift of the women of India. So the Swami felt that at long last some work would begin on his great dream of the rejuvenation of his beloved motherland.

Before leaving for home, the Swami wrote to his Madras followers, casually mentioning his intention to establish two centres, one at Calcutta, and the other at Madras, and that the Seviers intended to fund a Himalayan Centre. And he added, "We will begin work with these three centres; and later on we will get to Bombay and Allahabad. And from these points, if the Lord be pleased, we will invade not only India, but send bands of preachers to every country in the world."

On December 16, the Swami accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. Sevier left London for the Continent, Mr. Godwin sailing from Southampton to meet him in Naples. Now the Swami's mind was full of India. When an English friend asked him how he felt about India after four years' experience of "the luxurious, glorious, power-

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ful west", the Swami replied, "India I loved before I came away. Now the very dust of India has become holy to me, the very air is now to me holy, it is now the holy land, the place of pilgrimage, the *thirtha*."

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VII

The Triumphal Return

On December 30, 1896, the Swami boarded at Naples the steamer that was to bring him home after a continuous absence of four years. It was to reach Colombo on January 15. Seeing the Colombo harbour gradually coming into view, the Swami felt agog with excitement. He felt he was now in sight of India. He was not aware of the greater excitement he had created in his own country and the triumphal return that he was to have.

When the news reached India that he was returning, representative committees were formed in all the larger cities for giving him a grand reception. Journals throughout the country started a series of articles and editorials eulogising his services. His own *guru-bhai*, Swami Niranjanananda, hastened to Ceylon to receive him, while another fellow monk, Swami Sivananda proceeded to Madras for the same purpose. A number of personal disciples from Bengal and the north all made their way to Madras to await his arrival there. The Swami had no idea of the national storm he had created nor of the massive love and affection with which he would be received by the Indian people.

To us who have seen massive receptions given to public leaders after the advent of Mahatma Gandhi into Indian politics, the mass receptions that Vivekananda received on his return may not sound so

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thrilling. But the receptions that the Swami got were in 1897; and they were not for a political leader but for a man of God.

The receptions given to the Swami at Colombo only marked the beginning of his triumphal return. Swami Vivekananda was received by a large number of people of the Hindu community as his steam launch touched the jetty. He was profusely garlanded and then led in procession to a pandal in front of the temporary residence arranged for him in Cinnomon Gardens. There he was presented with an address to which he responded by disclaiming all personal content in the welcome he had received. "The spirituality of the Hindus", he said, "is revealed by the princely reception they have given to a begging *sanyasin*", and he urged the necessity of making religion the backbone of national life if the nation was to live and prosper. The subject of his first public lecture was "India, the Holy Land". His second was characteristically on the *Vedanta* philosophy and a universal religion on the basis of the *Vedas*. During his short stay of 11 days in Ceylon, (now Sri Lanka) and his journey through that country to Jaffna, the Swami received demonstrations of mass adulation that had never been accorded before to a *sanyasin*. As one of his companions remarked: "He would have been killed with kindness if he had stayed longer in Ceylon." From Jaffna he sailed for Pamban which he reached at about 3 p.m. on Tuesday, January 26. It is an odd coincidence that the nation he was so passionately bent on serving should have been declared a sovereign republic on the same day 53 years later; and to this day January 26 is celebrated all over the country as Republic Day.

The Raja of Ramnad came in person to meet the Swami in Pamban. Citizens greeted him with a tremendous ovation and presented him an address to which the Swami gave a brief reply pointing out that the backbone of Indian national life was neither politics nor military power, neither commercial supremacy nor mechanical genius, but religion. After worshipping at the Great Shiva temple

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at Rameshwaram, he addressed the large gathering outside and told them to worship Shiva not in images alone but in the poor, in the weak and in the diseased. From Ramnad the Swami wended his way to Madras, passing through Sivaganga, Manamadurai, Madurai, Tiruchchirapalli, Tanjavur, Kumbakonam and Mayavaram, receiving everywhere enthusiastic mass receptions. A few miles from Madras at a wayside station where the train was not to halt, hundreds of people who wanted to pay their homage to the Swami made the train stop by falling flat upon the railway track, moving the Swami almost to tears by their emotional outpouring. When he reached Madras, he was received at the station by a very large crowd with an enthusiasm unprecedented in the history of Madras. The Swami was taken in a procession, his carriage having been unharnessed and drawn by citizens, while thousands of others lined the streets and crowded round the windows and verandahs on the way. The procession ended at Castle Kernan, the residence of Mr. Biligiri Iyengar where the Swami was to stay. At Castle Kernan, two addresses were presented to him, one in Sanskrit and the other in Kannada, after which, at the request of Mr. Justice Subramanya Iyer the gathering dispersed to let the Swami get some rest.

The Swami stayed for nine days at Madras. During this period, 24 public addresses were presented to him in English, Sanskrit, Tamil and Telugu. Besides his reply to the major address in Victoria Hall, he delivered five public lectures, two in Victoria Hall, one in the Pachaiyappa's College, one in Harmston's Circus pavilion, and one in the Triplicane Literary Society. The topics on which he spoke were, "My Plan of Campaign", "The Sages of India", "*Vedanta in* relation to Practical Life", "The Future of India", and "Some Aspects of My Work in India.

The Swami left for Calcutta by steamer on February 15. When the steamer docked at Kidderpore, he was taken by special train the next morning to Sealdah Station where thousands of people had

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gathered to greet him in the early morning. Here again the horses were unharnessed by a band of students who then started drawing the carriage. A procession was formed and moved on to Ripon College where an informal reception was held, the major public function having been postponed by a week to give the citizens of Calcutta a better opportunity to see him and hear him. The Swami was put up at the riverside residence of Gopal Lal Seal in Cossipore, known as Seal's Garden, where he spent the day, the nights being spent with his fellow monks at the monastery which was then at Alambazar. His reply to the public address by the citizens of Calcutta was a masterpiece of oratory replete with fervent patriotism, and held up Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa before the nation as a spiritual ideal manifested in human form for the good of all races and of all religions. His next public address was on "*Vedanta* in All its Phases" wherein he pointed out that *Vedanta* is the climax of all systems of Hindu philosophy and religion and stressed the necessity of renunciation. He denounced hypocrisy and fanaticism and contrasted the degenerating influences of the *Vamachara* practices of *Tantras* with the strengthening and ennobling power of the the *Upanishadic* teachings.

All the time, the Swami was impressing upon the people, especially the young among them, the practical implications of *Vedanta* for living in the world. To one young man who complained that in spite of shutting the door of his room, closing his eyes and trying to meditate, he could not get peace, the Swami replied, "My boy, if you take my word, you will have first of all to open the door of your room and look around instead of closing your eyes. There are hundreds of poor and helpless people in the neighbourhood of your house; them you have to serve to the best of your ability. One who is ill and has no one to look after him, for him you will have to get medicine and diet and nurse him; one who has nothing to eat, you will have to feed him; one who is ignorant, you will have to teach

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him, well educated as you are. My advice to you is, if you want peace of mind, you have to serve others in this way as best as you can." To another, this time a professor, who asked, if all this talk of charity and doing good to the world was not really falling into the trap of *Maya* and would not lead to *Mukti*, the Swami replied: "Is not the idea of *Mukti* also in the domain of *Maya* ? Does not the *Vedanta* teach that the *Atman* is ever free? What is striving for *Mukti* to the *Atman*, then ?" To a preacher of the Cow Protection Society, who expressed his disinterest in helping people during famines and said their only object was to save the *Go-matas* as they called the Cows, he replied: "Sir, I have no sympathy with such organisations which do not feel for man, which, seeing before their eyes thousands of their famished brothers perishing from starvation, do not care to save them by offering even a morsel of food, but spend millions for the protection of birds and beasts. I do not believe any public good, worth the name, can come out of such societies."

The Swami was not only concerned with preaching his message to the public, he was even more interested in talking to his *guru-bhais* and bringing them round to his way of thinking and interpreting the *Vedanta*. Till now, his fellow monks in Alambazar had for their ideal the securing of personal *Mukti* and were intent on realissing the Supreme *Atman* by severe penance and meditation and remaining aloof from the word and its sorrows. The Swami was anxious to get them out of this individualistic religion and to replace it by one in which public spirit and service to fellow men would occupy a prominent place. To get them to change from what they believed was based on their whole nature and training, he had to struggle hard and use not only his unquestionable love for them but also his own interpretation of the life and teachings of their Master. He showed them that the crux of their Master's mission lay in bringing about a religious renaissance by mass uplift through service, and that the idea of personal liberation was unworthy of those who believed

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themselves to be favoured disciples of one whom they held was an Incarnation, namely, Sri Ramakrishna. He asked them to arouse themselves and awaken others and said that this was the mission entrusted to them by Sri Ramakrishna through him. Finally, his fellow disciples fell in with his views, knowing that his voice was the voice of the Master who had made him their leader; and they agreed to do anything and go anywhere at his bidding for the sake of the good of their fellow beings.

The Swami had already sent Swami Saradananda and Swami Abhedananda to the west to help in his work there. He now sent Swami Ramakrishnananda to Madras to open a Centre for propagating the teachings of the *Vedanta* there. And now Swami Akhandananda went to Murshidabad district to start famine relief work for the people dying of starvation there. The other *gurubhais* were also willing to take up, when needed, any work of religious and philanthropic utility launched by him or to further his ideas and plans of work in India and abroad. It was thus that there came into existence various monastic centres, *sevashramas*, and relief centres in times of plague, famine and flood, under the charge of his *gurubhais* and disciples.

Meanwhile the Swami's health was again being affected by his hectic activity in the heat of the plains and he was induced by his physicians to spend some time in Darjeeling. He, however, returned to Calcutta after two weeks to initiate four new *sanyasins* who were named Swamis Vivjananda, Nirbhayananda, Prakasananda and Nityananda. Speaking to them before initiation, the Swami told them that the *sanyasin* is born in the world for the salvation of his soul and the happiness of the many. "You must renounce everything," he continued, "you must not seek pleasure or comfort for yourselves, you must look upon lust and gold as poison, name and fame as the vilest filth, glory as a terrible hell, and pride of birth as sinful as drinking wine." He also stressed the need for perfect

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discipline and readiness to obey the leader. On the four *brahmacharins* nodding their assent, he initiated them as *sanyasins*.

On the afternoon of May 1, 1897, he convened a representative gathering of all the monastic and lay disciples of Sri Ramakrishna at Balaram Babu's house and broached his proposal for founding an Association in the name of Sri Ramakrishna. The proposal was received with enthusiastic approval, and resolutions were passed laying down the aims and objects of the movement and its main principles. Given below is the original charter of the Association.

"This Association (Sangha) shall be known as the Ramakrishna Mission.

"The aim of the Sangha is to preach those truths which Sri Ramakrishna had, for the good of humanity, preached and demonstrated by practical application in his own life, and to help others to put these truths into practice in their lives for their temporal, mental and spiritual advancement.

"The duty of the Mission is to conduct in the right spirit the activities of the movement inaugurated by Sri Ramakrishna for the establishment of fellowship among the followers of different religions, knowing them all to be so many forms only of one undying Eternal Religion.

'Its methods of action are (a) to train men so as to make them competent to teach such knowledge or sciences as are conducive to the material and spiritual welfare of the masses;(b) to promote and encourage arts and industries, and (c) to introduce and spread among the people in general *Vedantic* and other religious ideas in the way in which they were elucidated in the life of Sri Ramakrishna.

"The activities of the Mission should be directed to the establishment of *maths* and *ashramas* in different parts of India for the training of *sanyasins* and such of the householders as may be willing to devote their lives to educate others, and to the finding of the means by which they would be enabled to educate the people by going

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about from one province to another.

"Its work in the Foreign Department should be to send trained members of the Order to countries outside India to start centres there for the preaching of *Vedanta* in order to bring about a closer relation and better understanding between India and foreign countries.

"The aims and ideals of the Mission being purely spiritual and humanitarian, it shall have no connection with politics.

"Anyone who believes in the mission of Sri Ramakrishna or who sympathises or is willing to co-operate with the above-mentioned aims and objects of the Association is eligible for membership."

After the resolutions were passed, the Swami became the General President and made Swami Brahmananda and Swami Yogananda, the President and Vice-President, respectively, of the Calcutta centre. The Association began holding regular meetings every Sunday afternoon with discussions on the *Gita*, *Upanishads* and other Vedantic scriptures. The Mission was taken over by the *Math* started by the Swami at Belur in 1899 as the central seat of the monastic order, and its management was handed over to a Board of Trustees under a Deed of Trust in 1901.

Originally, the Belur *Math* was in charge of both missionary and philanthropic work. For the more efficient implementation of both these activities as well as for giving them a better legal status, a Society called the Ramakrishna Mission was registered in 1909 under the Societies Registration Act of 1860, and the management of the Mission was entrusted for the time being to a Governing Body consisting of the Trustees of the Belur *Math*. The Mission extended its activities and started various philanthropic and charitable activities in different parts of India, while the Belur *Math* set up various branch *Maths* in different parts of the country. While the Ramakrishna Mission and the Belur *Math* remain distinct and separate institutions, they work in close association, as the Governing Body of the Mission is identical with the Trustees of the Belur

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Math and both have their headquarters at Belur. The principal workers of the Mission are also members of the Ramakrishna *Math*.

The Swami did not however have an easy time in effecting this combination of service of the people and salvation of the individual. The traditional trait of the *sanyasin* was to shun society and avoid any involvement with the material world even for non-self-regarding purposes, his whole aim being to obtain realisation through meditation and thus free himself from rebirth. The Swami had to tell his fellow monks that Sri Ramakrishna was not a mere person but a Principle and that he was not only the apostle of renunciation and realisation but also of service to humanity in a spirit of worship. When one of his *gurubhais* suggested that the type of new *sanyasin* that Vivekananda advocated was incompatible with Sri Ramakrishna's ideal of renunciation, the Swami burst out: "You Think you understand Sri Ramakrishna better than myself ! You think *Jnana* is dry knowledge to be attained by a desert path, killing the tenderest faculties of the heart. Your *Bhakti* is sentimental nonsense which makes one impotent. Who cares for your *Bhakti* and *Mukti?* Who cares what the scriptures say? I will go to hell cheerfully a thousand times, if I can rouse my countrymen, immersed in *Tamas*, and make them stand on their own feet and be Men, inspired with the spirit of *Karma Yoga*. I am not a follower of Ramakrishna or any one. I am a follower of him only who carries out my plans. I am not a servant of Ramakrishna or any one, but for him only who serves, and helps others, without caring for his own *Mukti*." The Swami then ran from the room to his sleeping apartment. When a few of his fellow monks followed him there, they found him sitting in meditation in *Bhava Samadhi* with tears flowing from his eyes. After an hour, he came back to the sitting room and told his *gurubhais* : "When one attains *Bhakti* one's heart and nerves become so soft and delicate that they cannot bear even the touch of a flower. So I am trying and trying always to keep down the rush of *Bhakti* welling within me. I am trying to bind and bind

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myself with the iron chains of *Jnana*, for still my work to my motherland is unfinished, and my message to the world not yet fully delivered. Oh, I have work to do ! I am a slave of Ramakrishna, who left his work to be done by me and will not give me rest till I have finished it ! And, Oh, how shall I speak of him ! Oh, his love for me !"

Overwhelmed by the Swami's passionate outburst and his subsequent emotional near-breakdown, his fellow monks felt miserable at some of them having been the cause. All of them now realised the enormity of the sacrifice that Vivekananda had made by not pandering to his own nature of *Bhakti* or his overwhelming desire for *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*. He had not given way to his natural longing for quiet, solitude and meditation, and had taken up a life of incessant activity, of preaching and organising, because of the *Jnana* he had received on the true meaning of *Vedanta* from their Master. He had therefore devoted his life to the spread of this message and its implementation as fulfilment of the mission entrusted to him by the Master. They realised that this mission included not only Vivekananda but also all of them who were his *gurubhais*. Had not Sri Ramakrishna, who had initiated them as monks, told them that Vivekananda was their leader and they should accept his interpretation of the former's mission and message? In the face of this command personally given by their Master during his life time, and the enormous sacrifice that their beloved Naren had made of his health and natural bent of mind for the fulfilment of their Master's mission, Vivekananda's fellow monks felt that they should stop protesting against the non-traditional and new way of monastic life and duties that he desired to embody in the Ramakrishna Order. They now fell in line with his plan and helped in starting a new chapter in India's religious and social history by working the Ramakrishna Mission in the way desired by Vivekananda.

Again, the Swami's health was giving him trouble and he was urged to go to Almora with its cool and dry climate. Accordingly

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he left for Almora on May 11, accompanied by some of his brother-monks and disciples. He did not get much rest however, whole days being spent in religious discourses with the many visitors who came to see him; but the climate effected some improvement in his health. One June 9, he wrote, "I was born for the life of the scholar—retired, quiet, poring over my books. But the Mother dispenses otherwise. Yet the tendency is there.". On July 9, he sent a reply to a letter from an American friend who, appalled at the attacks being made on him at the instance of Christian missionaries from India, was apprehensive of the setback it may cause to his work there. After reassuring her that all was well with him, and far from being treated with disrespect in India he was, in fact, having a hero's welcome, the Swami wrote, "I never planned anything. I have taken things as they came. Only one idea was burning in my brain—to start the machine for elevating the Indian masses, and that I have succeeded in doing to a certain extent. It would have made your heart glad to see how my boys are working in the midst of famine and disease and misery, nursing by the mat-bed of the cholera-stricken *Pariah* and feeding the starving *Chandala*, and the Lord sends help to me and to them all. I feel my task is done—at best, three or four years more of life is left."

After a stay of about two months and a half in Almora, the Swami resumed his activity, literally whirling from place to place, taking private classes and delivering public lectures. An idea of the pace at which he moved can be had from his itinerary from August 9, when he reached Bareilly till the middle of January when he returned to Calcutta. Ambala, Amritsar, Dharamshala, Rawalpindi, Muree, Baramula, Srinagar, Pampur, Anantnag, Acchbal, back to Muree and Rawalpindi, then Jammu, Lahore, Delhi, Alwar, Khetri, Kishangarh, Ajmer, Jodhpur, Indore and Khandwa—all these places were covered during these five months with every day crowded with engagements from morning till evening. During this period, he met the Maharaja of Kashmir in Jammu, tried to restore

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harmony between the Arya Samajists and the followers of Sanatan Dharma in the Punjab, and had several meetings with Prof. Tirth Rama Goswami in Lahore, who subsequently became better known as Swami Rama Tirtha and preached *Vedanta* both in India and America. He also spent a most pleasant period as the guest of his devoted disciple the Maharaja of Khetri where he gave a lecture on *Vedantism* in which he severely criticised the system of "text-torturing indulged in even by the greatest commentators and regretted that the people were neither Hindus nor *Vedantins* but had become merely "don't touchists", with the kitchen as their temple and cooking pots their objects of worship. He called for the restoration of the *Upanishads* and the ending of the senseless quarrels that existed among the different Hindu sects. The Swami's lecturing campaign was now nearing its end. He had lost no opportunity of harking back to spirituality as the backbone on which the nation should be rebuilt and the importance of each individual in national regeneration by building his character on virtues like courage, strength, self-respect, love and service for others.

During the period mid-January 1898 to mid-June 1899, the Swami made Calcutta his headquarters, but spent a considerable part of his time outside in Darjeeling, Almora, Kashmir and Lahore. His main work in Calcutta was the training of *sanyasins* and *brahmacharis* for whom he took regular classes in the Hindu scriptures, besides giving lectures on the *Gita*, the *Upanishads*, material sciences and the history of nations. His special responsibility however was the training of his western disciples with their alien culture and unfamiliarity with Indian life and customs. He wanted them to appreciate India's culture, study India's problems, and learn to serve India. When one of them asked him, "Swamiji how can I best help you", his answer was "Love India". His star pupil was Sister Nivedita. She was also a strong personality and was intensely British with an aggressive Occidental outlook. And he was determined to make her an Indian in outlook and understanding, as

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otherwise she would not be able to fulfil her mission in India. Clash of opinion and conflict of sentiments became frequent. How it ultimately ended in peace is best told by the disciple herself. "And then a time came when one of the older ladies of our party, thinking perhaps that such intensity of pain inflicted might easily go too far, interceded kindly and gravely with the Swami. He listened silently and went away. At evening, however, he returned, and finding us together in the verandah, he turned to her and said, with the simplicity of a child, 'You were right. There must be a change. I am going away into the forests to be alone, and when I come back I shall bring Peace.' Then he turned and saw that above us the moon was new and a sudden exaltation came into his voice as he said, 'See! the Mohammedans think much of the new moon. Let us also with the new moon begin a new life!' As the words ended, he lifted his hands and blessed, with silent depths of blessing, his more rebellious disciple, by this time kneeling before him....It was assuredly a moment of wonderful sweetness of reconciliation. But such a moment may heal a wound. It cannot restore an illusion that has been broken into fragments. And I have told its story, only that I may touch upon its sequel. Long long ago, Sri Ramakrishna had told his disciples that the day would come when his beloved 'Naren' would manifest his own great gift of bestowing knowledge with a touch. That evening at Almora, I proved the truth of this prophecy. For alone, in meditation, I found myself gazing deep into an Infinite Good to the recognition of which no egoistic reasoning had led me. I learnt too, on the physical plane; the simple everyday reality of the experience related in the Hindu books on religious psychology. And I understood, for the first time, that the greatest teachers may destroy in us a personal relation, only in order to bestow the Impersonal Vision in its place."

The fullest account of the comprehensive range of the Swami's conversations is that given by Sister Nivedita in her "Notes of Some Wanderings with Swami Vivekananda." Describing the morning

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talks he used to give in Almora during this period, she has let the reader get vivid glimpses of how the Swami went from chastity as the central idea of eastern culture to the functional aspect of the four-fold castes, then the history of India and Mughal greatness, Chinese wisdom, and Italian civilisation, the origin and history of the Aryan people, the historic conflicts between the *Kshatriya* and the *Brahmin* in Indian history, the greatness of the Buddha whom he adored, Uma-Shiva and the Himalayas, the Bengali renaissance and Raja Rammohun Roy, the incredible Vidyasagar who turned an agnostic when he found 140,000 people dead of hunger and disease in the famine of 1864, and the story of David Hare, the Scot athiest who died nursing an old pupil through cholera to whom the clergy of Calcutta refused a Christian burial, and whose own students carried his dead body to bury in a swamp and made the grave, a place of pilgrimage. A frequent subject of his conversation was the Buddha, the recollection of whose whole life of compassion almost drove him into transports of love. Challenged that he, a Hindu, was talking like a Buddhist, he answered, "I am the servant of the servants of the servant of Buddha", adding, "who was ever there like *Him*—the Lord—who never performed one action for Himself—with a heart that embraced the whole world". Another morning, he talked of the Babists of Persia, in their days of martyrdom, of the woman who inspired and the man who worshipped and worked. On yet another day, when the early morning sun had lit up the snow-clad peaks of the Himalayas, he dwelt upon the Shiva up there as the white snowpeaks, and the light that fell upon Him as the Mother of the World. At another time, talking of Krishna, whose historical authenticity he was not too sure of, he asserted that if the idea had spiritual truth and consistency it mattered little whether it had objective reality. For, in reply to some doubts he had expressed to his Master about the authenticity of a certain religious history, did not Sri Ramakrishna say: "What! do you not then think that those who conceive such ideas must have been the thing itself?" And,

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on the last day he spent at Almora during that visit, Sister Nivedita records his talking of the first day when the doctor had diagnosed the Master's disease as cancer of the throat and had solemnly warned the young disciples about its infectives nature; Naren who came in half an hour later, found his fellow disciples huddled together discussing the dangers of the case. Then, "He saw at his feet the cup of gruel that had been partly taken by Sri Ramakrishna and which must have contained in it the germs of the fatal discharges of mucous and pus as it came out in his baffled attempts to swallow the thing on account of the stricture of the food passage in the throat. He picked it up and drank from it before them all. Never was the infection of cancer mentioned among the disciples again."

When he had only partially recovered his health, he heard of the sudden outbreak of plague in Calcutta. The people were running away in panic and the army was being called in to quell the riots that had broken out in the city. The Swami hastened back to Calcutta and on the very day of his arrival at the *Math*, May 3, he began drafting a manifesto in both Bengali and Hindi on the plague and the need for the immediate start of relief operations by the Mission. When a fellow monk asked him as to where the funds would come from, the Swami thundered back: "Why? We shall sell the newly bought *Math* grounds if necessary. We are *sanyasins*, we must be ready to sleep under the trees and live on daily *bhiksha* as we did before. Should we care for *Math* and possessions when by disposing of them we could relieve thousands suffering before our eyes!" Fortunately, promises of ample funds poured in. Arrangements were made for renting an extensive plot of ground for setting up segregation camps in accordance with Government Plague Regulations where patients would be accommodated and nursed in such a manner as not to offend the Hindu community. Workers came in numbers to co-operate with his disciples; and they were instructed by the Swami himself on sanitation and how to clean the lanes and

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the houses to which they were sent. By such action, the Swami had functioned as a practical *vedantin* who translated the metaphysics of the *Vedanta* to the service of the afflicted. And he left Calcutta for the Himalayas, only after the danger of an epidemic had passed and the stringent plague regulations were withdrawn by Government.

On his way from Calcutta to Nainital, the Swami impressed his companions with his acute consciousness of Indian history and his intense love of the country. He would retail, and with tenderness, the history of every city they passed as also of the rural areas. Traversing the Terai he would vividly recreate the days of Buddha's youth and his renunciation and his quest for truth, while the long stretches of fields, farms and villages would make him talk of Indian agriculture and the hospitality of the poor peasantry of India. He made them feel that the piety of the Hindu on the banks of the Ganga and that of the Muslim kneeling in his prayer wherever the ordained hour found him were both equally great and uniquely Indian. It was in Nainital that he met a Mohammedan gentleman, obviously an *advaita vedantist* at heart, who told him: "Swamiji, if in after times any claim you as an avatar, an especial incarnation of the Godhead, remember that I, a Mohammedan, am the first." He became greatly attached to the Swami and counted himself from then on as one of his disciples under the name of Mohammedananda.

Speaking at Nainital of the lethargy and apathy of his fellow countrymen for the material improvement of their country and their lack of enterprise, especially on industrial matters, he literally poured out his sorrow in the tears that ran down his face. A contemporary witness of the scene, and one who had been the Swami's classmate at school in Calcutta, Jogesh Chandra Dutta, writes: "I shall never forget that scene in my life ! He was a *tyagi*, he had renounced the world, and yet India was in the inmost depth of his soul. India was his love, he felt and wept for India, he died for India. India throbbed in his breast, beat in his pulses, in short, was inseparably bound

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up with his very life. . . ." From Nainital the Swami went to Almora which was where Sister Nivedita got her especial training from him; ending in her complete conversion and realisation, as narrated earlier.

When at Almora, the Swami arranged with Mr. and Mrs. Sevier and Swami Swarupananda to revive the *Prabudha Bharata* which had been started by his disciples in Madras and whose gifted young editor had just passed away. The journal was now to be run from Almora with Swarupananda as editor and Mr. Sevier as Manager, the latter promising to meet all the preliminary expenses. And he sent an inspiring poem of invocation, "To the Awakened India" for its first issue. It is appropriate to recall here the conversation that the Swami had in Almora in May or June 1897 with Aswini Babu, the saintly patriot and devoted admirer of the Master, who had met him 14 years ago in Calcutta at Sri Ramakrishna's behest. Asked as to which way lay India's salvation, the Swami replied: "I have nothing more to tell you than what you have heard from the Master—that religion is the very essence of our being, and all reforms must come through it to be acceptable to the masses." Asked as to whether he meant by religion any particular creed, he refused to identify religion with any particular creed and added, "The essence of my religion is strength. The religion that does not infuse strength into the heart is no religion to me, be it of the *Upanishads*, the *Gita* or the *Bhagavata*. Strength is religion and nothing is greater than strength." When Aswini Babu asked him what he should do, the Swami told him that he should spread man-making education among the masses and make his students' character as strong as the thunderbolt. He was fed up with the passivity and disinterest in public affairs induced by *Radha-Krishna* songs and dance without regard for the real implications of *Bhakti*. "Go to the Untouchables", he told him, "the cobblers, the sweepers and others of their kind and tell them, 'you are the soul of the nation and in you lies infinite energy which can revolutionise the world.

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Stand up, shake off the shackles and the whole world shall wonder at you." He sounded like Marx before him and Lenin and Mao after him. He continued, "Go and found schools among them and invest them with the sacred thread". How can any one doubt that it was Vivekananda who gave the first call for mass consciousness and mass uplift in modern India. We all talk so much today of mass participation and mass uplift, but our cry is based on vote-catching and the politics of personal power and not on real religion and renunciation of personal objectives for public service, as was the case with Vivekananda.

From Almora the Swami and his party went on to Srinagar and spent more than a month living in houseboats on the river Jhelum. This was another period of educational feast for his companions. At times he would break off from the party to roam about alone and come back radiant from his contact with the Universal Reality which he was able to find in solitude and meditation. During this period, many excursions were made to, including the old temple of Pandrenathan near Islamabad, ruins of the two great temples at Avantipur, and to the ruins of Martand. At Acchbal, the Swami suddenly announced his decision to go to Amarnath along with the several thousand pilgrims who were on their way to the shrine. Only Sister Nivedita was to go with him, the rest of the party were to accompany him upto Pahalgam and stay there till he returned. After some initial hostility, the Swami became a great favourite among the scores of monks who were on that pilgrimage and they came to him to seek knowledge and continued to do so, though they could not understand his warmth of love and sympathy for Islam. The Mohammaden Tahsildar who was the state official in charge of the pilgrimage and his subordinate officials were so attracted to the Swami that they attended his talks daily and afterwards entreated him to initiate them.

When the Swami at last reached Amarnath and entered the Cave, his whole frame was shaking with emotion. Clad only in a

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loin cloth and his body smeared with ashes, he entered the shrine and when he saw the shining purity of the great ice *linga*, he almost swooned with emotion. He told his companions later that a great mystical experience came upon him then and he was blessed with a vision of Shiva himself. And for many days after his worship at the Amarnath shrine, he could speak of nothing but Shiva, the Eternal, the Great Monk, rapt in meditation and aloof from all worldliness. Following this his devotion concentrated itself on the Mother; and he would worship as Uma the little four-year-old daughter of his Mohammedan boatman. He once told his disciples during those days that "wherever he turned he was conscious of the presence of the Mother as if She was a person in that room". One day in the second week of September, he had an experience comparable only to the one he had in Dakshineshwar years ago when, at the instance of his Master, he had gone into the Shrine to seek the blessings of Kali for the removal of his family's poverty. He had gone in his boat to a solitary place, his brain seething with the consciousness of the Mother and determined to get revelation of Her as the One behind all phenomena. And it came. While his vision was at its most intense pitch he wrote his well-known poem "Kali, the Mother", and then fell on the floor lost to consciousness and soared into the highest realms of *Bhava Samadhi*. Following this experience, he retired to the springs of Kshir Bhavani where he spent a week worshipping at the shrine of the Mother. He started practising terrible austerities. All thought of the leader, worker and teacher left him and he became the pure *sanyasin*.

Returning to Srinagar transfigured by his experience, he entered the house boat, raised his hands in benediction and placed some marigolds that he had offered to the Mother on the head of every one of his disciples. "No more Hari Om. It is all Mother now", he said sitting down, "All my patriotism is gone. Everything is gone. Now it is only Mother; Mother. I have been very wrong. Mother said to me, 'What even if unbelievers should enter my

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temples and defile My images ? What is that to you? Do you protect me, or do I protect you ?' So there is no more patriotism. I am only a little child." The Swami had evidently reached the highest stage of mysticism. Action, even unselfish and good motivated action, was no longer necessary. It was now all surrender; knowledge and action had merged in *Bhakti* and only *Bhakti* remained.

The Swami now lost all interest in the future and planning for the future. He only wanted silence and obscurity and the life of the monk. He told his companions, "Swamiji was dead and gone; who was he that he should feel the urge for teaching the world? It was all fuss and vanity. The Mother had no need of him, but only he of Her. Work, when one has seen this, is nothing but illusion." The river trip to Baramula, from where he left for Lahore the next day on October 11, was marked by the silence of the Swami, who preferred to be alone as he walked on the roadside both morning and evening. He looked so ill and worn out that his companions were filled with apprehension. Sister Nivedita gives poignant expression to this feeling: "The physical ebb of the great experience through which he had just passed—for even suffering becomes impossible, when a given point of weariness is reached; and similarly, the body refuses to harbour a certain intensity of the spiritual life for an indefinite period —was leaving him doubtless more exhausted, than he himself suspected. All this contributed, one imagines, to a feeling that none of us knew for how long a time we might now be parting."

The Swami returned to the monastery at Belur on October 18, and despite failing health, resumed his old life with the monks, taking classes, answering questions, and training the members. The newly-acquired grounds of the *Math* had been consecrated seven months earlier, when the whole brotherhood wended its way in procession from Nilamber Mukherjee's garden house to the site of the new monastery, headed by the Swami who carried on his right

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shoulder the urn containing the hallowed remains of Sri Ramakrishna. When the Swami neared the *Math*, he addressed the procession and outlined its future in the following words: "It would be a centre in which would be recognised and practised a grand harmony of all creeds and faiths as exemplified in the life of Sri Ramakrishna; and only ideas of religion in its universal aspect would be preached. And from this centre of universal toleration would go forth the shining message of goodwill and peace and harmony to deluge the whole world."

After the consecration ceremony, he prayed to his Master to bless the place with his hallowed presence for ever and make it a unique centre for the harmony of all religions and sects and for the good and happiness of the many. After outlining his detailed plans for the development of the *Math*, the Swami told his disciples: "Know this that *Jnana*, *Bhakti* and *Shakti* are already in every human being. It is only the difference in the degree of their manifestation that makes one great or small. We must see to it that people of all sects and creeds from the *Brahmana* down to the *Chandala*, will find on coming here their respective ideals manifested. We have to exemplify the truth of the pure *Advaita* in practical life. We have to take the whole world with us to *Mukti*. When you realise this, you cannot live in this world without treating every one with exceeding love and compassion. This is indeed Practical *Vedanta*."

The Swami now began to suffer from asthma. His mind was also constantly getting away from his surroundings into deep states of meditation and his fellow monks were hard put to it to bring him down to earth from this exalted state. He became an embodiment of love and appeared terribly afflicted by the misery of the world.

The Swami was nevertheless carrying on his work of teaching and training. He spent a month in Vaidyanath and wrote many letters to his disciples. He was seen at his best during these days in his monastic aspect, constantly teaching his disciples the ideals and

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practice of the monastic life; for it was on the monks that he had set his faith both for spiritual salvation and for service to the community. He called upon them to have faith in themselves, to believe first in themselves, and then in God. He wanted them to follow their hearts whenever there was a conflict between the heart and the brain, and denounced all attempts to set up special rights and privileges for some people whether on religious or other grounds, and wanted the highest knowledge to be made available to all without any distinction. He considered that work was itself sacred and therefore that all work was sacred. "We must combine the practicality and culture of the finest citizenship with love of poverty and purity, and through the renunciation that characterise the true monk and man of God". He warned them to have nothing to do with the rich but to treat the poor with loving care and serve them joyfully with all their might. "To pay respect to the rich and hang on them for support has been the bane of all the monastic communities of our country. A true *sanyasin* should scrupulously avoid that." Sometimes he would rebuke them for their indiscipline. "Every one here wants to lead and none to obey. He only can be a great commander who knows how to obey, without a word or murmur, that which is for the general good." And he would tell them repeatedly, "Never forget, service to the world and realisation of God are the ideals of the monk." When a disciple entreated that he be allowed to practice further *Sadhanas* and achieve his own salvation first, he thundered back, "You will go to hell if you seek your own salvation. Seek the salvation of others if you want to reach the Highest. Kill the desire for personal *Mukti*. That is the greatest of all *Sadhanas*." And then he called the two disciples who had provoked him into the worship room of the monastery, sat with them in meditation, told them solemnly that he was infusing his own *Shakti* into them, and treated them with the most loving kindness. Later they left at his behest to preach and serve in Dacca. And he sent two others to preach in Gujarat. He welcomed them on their

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return after four months and was delighted with the success they had achieved in rousing public interest in Sri Ramakrishna's message. And then he was able to get the beautiful estate of Mayavati, 50 miles from Almora and at a height of 6,300 feet, where he had started his long-dreamt of *Advaita Ashram*, also finding there a permanent home for the *Prabudha Bharata*. In the *Ashrama*, there is no external worship of images, pictures, or symbols of God nor any religious ceremony except the *Viraja Homa* not even the worship of his own Master, which is the central feature of all other monastic centres.

Before leaving again for America and the west to consolidate the work being done there, the Swami gave his fellow monks and disciples a parting address on *Sanyasa*. He told them that too high and an impossible ideal was wrong as also too much of practicality. "You must try to combine in your life immense idealism with immense practicality. You must be prepared to go into deep meditation now and next moment be ready to go and cultivate these fields. You must be prepared to explain the intricacies of the *Shastras* now and the next moment to go and sell the produce of the fields in the market. The aim of the monastery was man-making and the true man is he who is strong as strength itself and yet possesses a woman's heart."

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VIII

An Indian Summer in America

THE SWAMI'S second trip to the west had to be more of a holiday and rest for him in view of the declining state of his health. Leaving Calcutta on June 20, 1899, he reached London on July 31, where he stayed till the middle of August. He spent a restful and quiet time in Wimbledon and did not undertake any public work in England. He left for New York on August 16, and immediately went to stay at the country residence of Mr. & Mrs. Leggett, about 150 miles from New York, and waited there for divine guidance about his next effort. He was joined a month later by Sister Nivedita and remained there till November 5, improving in health under the treatment of a famous osteopath arranged by his hosts. The Swami then resumed his work and spent a fortnight in New York where he lectured regularly at the Vedantic Society room which had been opened by Swami Abhedananda as the Vedanta Society's permanent quarters in New York. He then left for California stopping in Chicago on the way, where he met old friends of the Parliament of Religions, and reached California in the first week of December. He did not return to New York till June 7 of the next year.

The Swami had a busy time in California. He remained in Los Angeles till the middle of February and gave a series of

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lectures on *Vedanta* philosophy. He held many classes and delivered a number of public lectures at the headquarters of an association called "Home of Truth" in Los Angeles, this time concentrating on *Raja Yoga* and dwelling on its implications as an exercise in applied psychology. His non-sectarian stand and reverence for the basic teachings of Jesus Christ won much appreciation as also his own personality. Thus the magazine *Unity* which was full of praise for the work he was doing in Los Angeles wrote of him as under: "There is combined in Swami Vivekananda the learning of the University President, the dignity of an archbishop, and the grace and winsomeness of a free and natural child." He now moved on to San Francisco, where he stayed till the end of May. During this period he held regular training classes in *Raja Yoga* and meditation and gave public lectures on the *Gita*, *Bhakti Yoga* and *Vedanta* philosophy. The subjects on which he spoke during his Sunday lectures included the message of all religions, as can be seen from some of the titles he used, namely, "Buddha's Message to the World", "The Religion of Arabia and Mohammed the Prophet", "Is *Vedanta* Philosophy the Future Religion?", "Christ's Message to the World", "Mohammed's Message to the World", and "Krishna's Message to the World". He was a Hindu missionary and yet the religion he preached was the reality of truth underlying all the world's religions. *Vedanta* centres were established in several parts of the State, notably in San Francisco. Before leaving California, he received a gift of 160 acres of land for the establishment of a retreat for the students of *Vedanta*. It was ideally situated for the purpose, surrounded by forests and hills at an elevation of 2500 feet on the eastern slope of Mount Hamilton in the Santa Clara County of California. Named *Shanti Ashrama* or Peace Retreat, it was opened in August by Swami Turiyananda who went there with 12 students whom he trained regularly in meditation living with them an austere monastic life.

This renewed activity of lecturing and training left the Swami

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again completely exhausted and in need of rest and medical supervision. However, during this Indian summer in California, the Swami would often join picnic parties in the hills between Pasadena and Los Angeles and even beyond Pasadena in the forest defiles and mountain valleys and give himself relaxation. He would also tell his companions stories from his Indian experience and reminiscences from his previous American visit, and try to educate them in Indian ideals in an informal fashion.

Though the Swami was thus full of mirth and relaxation, the work of teaching and training he was again doing with intensity finds him longing for escape from the world to the inner quiet and peace of meditation and realisation. In a letter dated April 18, 1900, he writes to Miss Macleod: "Work is always difficult. Pray for me that my work stops for ever and my whole soul be absorbed in Mother. After all, I am only the boy who used to listen with rapt wonderment to the wonderful words of Ramakrishna under the *banyan* tree at Dakshineshwar. That is my true nature; works and activities, doing good and so forth, are all super-impositions—I have long given up my place as the leader. I have no right to raise my voice. Since the beginning of this year I have not dictated anything in India. Behind my work was ambition, behind my love was personality, behind my purity was fear, behind my guidance my thirst for power. Now they are vanishing and I drift. I come, Mother, I come, a spectator, no more an actor."

The Swami now decided to leave for Paris at the invitation of the Leggetts who pressed him to come there for his health and also to speak at the Foreign Delegates Committee of the Congress of the History of Religions that was being held in conjunction with the Paris Exposition of 1900. Before going to Paris, he returned to New York on June 7 and left on July 20. During his stay in New York, he conducted classes, delivered lectures, and made arrangements for carrying on the work he had started not only in New York, but also in California. Swami Abhedananda was to carry on in New

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York and Swami Turiyananda was persuaded to take up the work in California. The Swami had certainly cause to be satisfied with the growth of *Vedanta* consciousness of which he had laid the foundations in the Parliament of Religions in Chicago seven years earlier. Among the celebrities, who were in sympathy with the Swami's work and with *Vedanta* philosophy and Indian culture, were Professor Seth Low, the President of the Columbia University, Prof. A.V.W. Jackson of Columbia College, Professors Thomas R. Price and E. Engalsmann of the College of the City of. New York, and Professors Richard Botthiel, N.M. Butler, N.A. McLouth, E.G. Sihler, Calvin Thomas and A. Cohn of the New York University.

It may perhaps be appropriate to close the story of his American saga with some extracts from the reminiscences of this period recorded by an intimate disciple: "The Swami's personality impressed itself on the mind with visual intensity. The speaking eyes, the wealth of facial expression and gesticulation; the wondrous Sanskrit chanting, sonorous, melodious, impressing one with the sense of mystic potency; the translations following in smiling confidence—all these, set off by the spectacular apparel of the Hindu *sanyasin* —who can forget them? As a lecturer he was unique: never referring to notes, as most lecturers do; and though he repeated many discourses on request, they were never mere repetitions. He seemed to be giving something of himself. to be speaking from a super-experience. His business was to make his hearers understand, and he succeeded, as perhaps no other lecturer on abstruse subjects ever did. Seated cross-legged on the divan, clothed in his *sanyasin* garb, with hands held one within the other on his lap, and with his eyes apparently closed, he might have been a statue in bronze, so immovable was he. A Yogi, indeed! Awake only to transcendental thought, he was the ideal, compelling veneration, love and devotion."

The Swami had finished his work in America and was not to return there. But his work lives and continues to grow.

He reached Paris by August and stayed there most of the time

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interspersed with short visits to Lannin in the province of Brittany, Vienna, Constantinople, Athens, and Egypt. The highlight of his stay in Paris were his two lectures at the Congress of the History of Religions which he delivered in French, having learned that language within two months. In his first lecture, he tried to clear the misinterpretation placed on the *Shaligrama-shila* and *Shiva-Linga* by the attempts of western orientalists to trace their origin to mere phallicism. In his second lecture, he dwelt on the *Vedas* as the common basis of both Hinduism and Buddhism and every other religious belief in India and spoke critically of the alleged influence of Greek thought and art on Indian culture. Among the distinguished persons with whom he came into intimate contact during his stay in Paris were Professor Patrick Geddes of Edinburgh University, Monsieur Jules Bois, Pere Hyacinthe, Mr. Hiram Maxim, Madame Calve, Madame Sarah Bernhardt, Princess Demidoff, and his own countryman, Dr J.C. Bose, who had also been invited to attend the Exposition in connection with the Congress of Scientists, and who by his remarkable discoveries had thrilled the whole scientific world.

The Swami had now a premonition that all was not well in India and became restless. He decided suddenly to return to India and arrived at the Belur Monastery on the night of December 9 without any prior notice. His unexpected return thrilled his brother monks and the *brahmacharis*; and the night was spent in great rejoicing, the Swami regaling them with his experiences in the west.

The Swami learnt on his arrival at the *Math* that his beloved disciple J.H. Sevier had passed away on October 28, thus confirming his premonition that something to distress him had happened in India. He immediately wired to Mrs. Sevier that he was going to Mayavati and reached there on January 3, 1901, after a strenuous journey of 65 miles from the railway station of Kathgodam through a heavy snow-fall. He remained in Mayavati till January 18. He was so charmed by the place and its surroundings that he told Mrs.

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Sevier: "In the latter part of my life, I shall give up all public work and pass my days in writing books and whistling merry tunes by this lake, free as a child." But the Divine Mother had willed otherwise. Within less than 19 months from his visit to Mayavati, the Swami was to pass to his eternal rest beyond this world.

The Swami returned to the Belur *Math* on January 24, 1901.

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IX

Last Days

THE SWAMI returned to Calcutta from Mayavati on January 24, 1901, and stayed in the Belur *Math* till his end. Except for a visit to East Bengal (now bangla Desh) in 1901 and Assam and short trips to Gaya and Varanasi in 1902, he did not leave Calcutta during this period.

He went to Dacca first with a large party of his *sanyasin* disciples on March 18 and received a tumultous welcome. After delivering two public lectures there and holding informal meetings every afternoon for the many visitors who came to see him daily, he went to Chandranath and Kamakhya, both well-known places of pilgrimage, and stopped for some days at Gopalpura and Ganpati. Meanwhile his health condition continued to deteriorate and besides his diabetes, he suffered a severe attack of asthma at Dacca. On his return to Calcutta, and on the insistent plea of his fellow monks and disciples, he gave up his plans for work and lived at the *Math* in comparative retirement for about seven months. But his mind was always seeking the deepest meditation. However he also gave time to the people who came to meet him. He was now living more as a private monk than as a public figure. Sometimes he would go about the monastery with only a *kaupin*, or stroll along the village path leading from the monastery gates to the high road

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immersed in thought and clad in the long robe of the wandering monk. Sometimes he would spend a day in Calcutta or with books in his own rooms at the *Math*. Often he would be lost in song or meditation and yet, on many days, he would supervise the cooking arrangements himself and prepare delicacies for the inmates of the monastery. He continued to have intimate discussions with his fellow monks and disciples on such subjects as renunciation, *brahmacharya*, Indian music and literature, European and Asian art, *Gurukula* system of education, *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* and the presence of divinity in all human beings. His discourses covered not only spiritual matters but also included whole branches of secular knowledge such as sociology and science. He would also joke with his fellow monks and make them laugh. He would himself rouse them from sleep in the early hours of the morning and keep them under a vigilant eye to see that they did all the chores and observed the routine that he had drawn up in detail for their monastic living.

After returning from East Bengal, he got himself a number of pets on whom he spent some of the enormous love that was welling up within him. He had a dog called Bagha, a she-goat whom he called Hansi, several cows, sheep, ducks, geese, an antelope, a stork, and a kid which he named "Mantru" and which accompanied him wherever he went. Under his inspiration, several Bengali youths founded a Ramakrishna Home of Service by renting a small house and trying with their limited means to provide food, shelter and medical aid to destitute pilgrims, helpless widows and aged persons lying ill in the streets and *ghats* of that city. The Swami was delighted with them and told them, "You have always my love and blessings. Go bravely. Never mind your poverty; money will come; a great new thing will grow out of it, surpassing your fondest hopes." And he wrote an appeal to accompany the first report of their institution.

About this time, a number of *Santhal* labourers used to work in the *Math* grounds. The Swami would spend some of his time with them, listening to their tales of woe. Sometimes these would move

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him to tears, and then one of them, Keshta who became his favourite, would say: "Now you must go, Swami, we won't tell you any more of our troubles, for it makes you weep." One day he treated them to a feast including a number of delicacies in the menu. The Swami himself supervised the serving of food to these guests who exclaimed: "O Swami, where did you get such fine things. We have never tasted such dishes before." When the meal was over, the Swami told them: "You are *Narayanas*; today I have entertained the Lord Himself by feeding you." He later told a disciple, "I actually saw the Lord Himself in them. How simple-hearted and guileless they are." Sometime after this incident, he told the *sanyasins* and *brahmacharins* of the *Math*: "See how simple-hearted these poor illiterate people are! Can you mitigate their misery a little? If not, of what use is your wearing the *Gerua* ? Sacrificing everything for the good of others, this is the true *Sanyasa*. Alas ! How can we have the heart to put a morsel to our mouths, when our countrymen have not enough wherewith to feed or clothe themselves ! Let us, throwing away all pride of learning and study of the *Shastras* and all *Sadhanas* for the attainment of personal *Mukti*, go from village to village devoting our lives to the service of the poor. Let us through the force of our character and spirituality and our austere living convince the rich man of his duty to the masses and induce him to give money for the service of the poor and the distressed. Alas ! Nobody in our country thinks of the low, the poor and the miserable ! These are the backbone of the nation, whose labour produces our food. Where is the man in our country who sympathises with them, who shares in their joys and sorrows ! Is there any fellow-feeling or sense of *Dharma* left in the country ? There is only 'Don't touchism' now ! Kick out all such degrading usages ! How I wish to demolish the barriers of 'Don't touchism' and go out and bring together one and all, calling out, 'Come all ye that are poor and destitute, fallen and downtrodden ! We are one in the name of Ramakrishna!' Unless they are raised, this motherland of ours will never

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awake ! What are we good for if we cannot provide them with food and clothing ! I see as clear as daylight that the same *Brahman*, the same *Shakti*, that is in me, is in them as well ! Only there is a difference in the degree of manifestation—that is all. In the whole history of the world have you ever seen a country rise without a free circulation of the national blood throughout its entire body ! If one limb is paralysed, then even with the other limbs whole, not much can be done with that body—Know this for certain."

His illness was growing and this was causing great anxiety to his fellow monks and disciples. Dropsy had made his feet swollen making it difficult for him to walk. He was having constant trouble from diabetes and asthma. Sleep almost deserted him. The Swami was ordered to abandon even the slightest exertion and give up all intellectual work. He was now confined to bed but busied himself with manual work in the gardens whenever he felt a little better. His fellow monks tried to keep visitors away from him and abstain from any serious conversation that might send him into his inevitable fits of meditation. They grew nervous about his condition and persuaded him to place himself under the treatment of a well-known Ayurvedic practitioner. The Swami strictly adhered to the treatment which did not allow him to drink water or take any salt. And he felt better after two months' use of Ayurvedic medicines. But the Swami had no respite from his work. Upto his passing away in 1902, the Swami went on receiving friends and visitors and instructing his disciples. When his fellow monks requested him to refrain from doing so in the interests of his health, he replied, "Look here, what good is this body ? Let it go in helping others. Did not the Master preach unto the very end ! And shall I not do the same? I do not care a straw if the body goes. You cannot imagine how happy I am when I find earnest seekers of truth to talk to. In the work of waking up the *Atman* in my fellow men, I shall gladly die again and again."

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As the days passed by, the Swami increasingly felt the need for withdrawing himself from the task of directing the affairs of the *Math*. "How often", he said, "does a man ruin his disciples by remaining always with them. When men are once trained, it is essential that their leader leave them, for without his absence they cannot develop themselves." "When June closed", writes Sister Nivedita, "he knew well enough that the end was near". "I am making ready for death", he said to one who was with him on the Wednesday before he died. "A great *tapasya* and meditation has come upon me and I am making ready for death." She continues: "On Wednesday of the same week, the day being *Ekadashi*, and himself keeping the fast in all strictness, he insisted on serving the morning meal to some disciples. Each dish as it was offered—boiled seeds of the jack-fruit, boiled potatoes, plain rice, and ice-cold milk—formed the subject of playful chat; and finally, to end the meal, he himself poured the water over their hands, and dried them with a towel. 'It is I who should do these things for you, Swamiji! Not you for me!' was the protest naturally offered. But his answer was startling in its solemnity—'Jesus washed the feet of His disciples!' Something checked the answer—'But that was the last time!' as it rose to the lips of the disciples; and the words remained unuttered. This was well. For here also, the last time had come."

On the day of his death, the Swami gave no indication of his coming end. In the morning, he meditated in solitude in his room with all doors and windows closed for three hours from eight to eleven. He then dined in the refectory with his fellow monks and disciples, which was unusual for him. He relished his food and said that he had never felt better. The Swami then asked Swami Shuddhananda to get a copy of *Shukla Yajur Veda* from the library and, after hearing a commentary on one of the verses, said that the interpretation given did not appeal to his mind and suggested that his disciples "should try to discover the true import of these *shlokas* and

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make original reflections and commentaries on the *Shastras.*" A quarter of an hour after his midday repast, he entered the *Brahmacharis'* room and called them to attend the class on Sanskrit grammar. The class lasted for nearly three hours but without getting monotonous, as the Swami would either tell a witty story or make *bons mots* now and then to lighten the teaching as was his habit. Sometime later, he went out for a long walk accompanied by Swami Premananda to whom he talked about his favourite scheme of founding a Vedic College in the *Math*, assuring him that, even if it did nothing else, the study of Vedas "would kill superstitions".

As the evening came, the Swami looked withdrawn; and when the bell for the evening service rang, he retired to his own room to meditate, leaving word that no one was to come to him unless called for. At about 8 p.m. he called one of his fellow monks and requested him to fan his head. He lay down on his bed quietly; and the one who was tending him thought he was either sleeping or meditating. An hour later, his hands trembled a little and he breathed once deeply. Again he breathed in the same manner, his eyes becoming fixed in the centre of his eyebrow and his face assuming a divine expression; and all was over.

Swami Sharadananda, on whose letter of July 24 to Dr. Logan of the San Francisco Vedantic Society the account of the Swami's end is based, adds, "All through the day he felt as free and easy as possible, nay, freer than what he had felt for the last six months. He meditated in the morning for three hours at a stretch, took his meals with a perfect appetite, gave talks on Sanskrit grammar, philosophy and on the *Vedas* to the Swamis at the *Math* for more than two hours and discoursed on the *Yoga* philosophy. He walked in the afternoon for about two miles, and on returning enquired after everyone very tenderly. While resting for a time he conversed on the rise and fall of nations with his companions, and then went into his own room to meditate—you know the rest."

Three days before the Swami passed away, he had pointed to a

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particular spot on the bank of the Ganga to Swami Premananda with whom he was taking a stroll, on the *Math* grounds, and said: "When I give up the body, cremate it there." He died at the age of 39 years, 5 months and 24 days, fulfilling his own prediction that he would not reach the age of forty.

On the spot where he was cremated, there now stands a temple in his name.

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Section II

The Teachings of Vivekananda

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X

Religion

THE HEART of Vivekananda's teachings was in the sphere of religion. As a young student, he had asked Maharshi Debendranath Tagore whether he had seen God and had not received either a positive or negative answer. He had then found a living saint in Sri Ramakrishna who had not only seen God but felt himself constantly in His company. And under his training and through his love and power of transmission of spirituality, Vivekananda had experienced *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* and felt the presence of the Universal Reality proclaimed in the *Upanishads*. He had also felt the living presence of the Divine Mother, the Kali of Dakshineshwar, who was a constant reality to his Master. Religion had come to Vivekananda therefore through actual realisation of God.

He had of course read the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Gita* and the Commentaries, apart from the *Shastras*, *Puranas* and classical Sanskrit literature; and he had also read the scriptures of other religions like Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, and Jainism. And he had wandered all over India meeting *pandits* and *sadhus* in his quest for spiritual knowledge. But it was Sri Ramakrishna who gave him his insight into real religion, his firm conviction about the validity and universality of the *Vedanta* and his equally strong belief in its practical relevance to life and living. The fountain-head of Vivekananda's teachings on religion was Sri Ramakrishna, his spiri-

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tuality, his love, and his homely wisdom garnered with such care and presented to posterity by his disciples as "The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna". As Vivekananda himself has said: "If there has been anything achieved by me, by thoughts, words or deeds, if from my lip has fallen one word that has helped anyone in this world, I lay no claim to it. It was his. All that has been weak has been mine; and all that has been life-giving, strengthening, pure and holy has been his inspiration, his words, and he himself."

The heart of this religion was *Vedanta* revealed by intuition and experienced through actual realisation by seers and prophets whose very identities as individuals with name and history are not known to the world. But they were born in India, their recorded thoughts and feelings are to be found in the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, and the *Gita*, and the language used is Sanskrit. Their thoughts and feelings did not constitute one single holy book nor did they owe their existence to one single prophet. And what Sri Ramakrishna taught Vivekananda was based on what they had stated. But what made Sri Ramakrishna's teaching unique was personal realisation of these truths, and the life he led, which was a living embodiment of the religion these scriptures contained.

The first article of what Vivekananda taught on religion was the universality of its presence in all the religions of the world, not only Hinduism but also Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, and other faiths. He accepted the validity of all faiths and the authority of their founders, because he was certain that they were all identical in their essence, however much they may differ in form or presentation or details. His Master had shown by practising the disciplines of several religions that they all gave him the same sense of realisation, validating the ancient Rigvedic saying *Ekam Sat Vipra Bahudhah Vadanti*—"God is one but wise men describe Him in several ways". Vivekananda could therefore boldly proclaim: "Through high philosophy or low, through the most exalted mythology or the grossest, through the most refined ritualism or arrant fetishism, every

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sect, every soul, every nation, every religion, consciously or unconsciously, is struggling upward, towards God; every vision of truth that man has is a vision of Him and of none else."

He gave several illustrations in support of his thesis. But the most effective one was when he referred to God as water and the different religions as vessels of different shapes and sizes which contained this water. "Suppose we all go with vessels in our hands to fetch water from a lake. One has a cup, another a jar, another a bucket, and so forth, and we all fill our vessels. The water in each case naturally takes the form of the vessel carried by each of us. He who brought the cup, has the water in the form of a cup; he who brought the jar, his water is in the shape of the jar, and so forth; but in every case, water, and nothing but water is in the vessel. So it is in the case of religion; our minds are like these vessels, and each one of us is trying to arrive at the realisation of God. God is like that water filling these different vessels, and in each vessel, the vision of God comes in the form of the vessel. Yet He is One. He is God in every case. This is the only recognition of universality that we can get."

While Vivekananda thus upheld the validity of all religions and their right to independent existence, he was also fully aware of the historical results accompanying this multiplicity of sects and faiths. He has referred to the horrors through which the world passed in ancient times, when every sect was trying by every means in its power to tear to pieces the other sects. Apart from the sword and other material used in these inter-religious conflicts, he drew attention to the even more terrible weapons of contempt, social hatred, and social ostracism hurled against persons who did not think in exactly the same way as they did. Thus the basic identity of different religions had not prevented their followers from mutual conflicts. The unity attributed by theory had been belied by the disunity that prevailed in practice. Each of these religions and sects seemed to function in one way in respect of their individual followers

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and in quite a different way when it came to the followers of other religions and sects. To quote Vivekananda himself on the subject: "Each religious sect has claimed the exclusive right to live. And thus we find that though there is nothing that has brought to man more blessings than religion; yet at the same time, there is nothing that has brought more horror than religion. Nothing has made more for love and peace than religion, nothing has engendered fiercer hatred than religion. Nothing has made the brotherhood of man more tangible than religion; nothing has bred more bitter enmity between man and man than religion. Nothing has built more charitable institutions, more hospitals for men, and even for animals, than religion; nothing has deluged the world with more blood than religion."

This paradoxical picture was explained by Vivekananda as the result of the conflicting roles played by the prophets who created the religions and the priests who took over and then organised and sustained them over the centuries. He said: "It is the prophet or the Incarnation who propounded values and gave the call to religion; and there is hardly any difference in substance between what was preached by the different prophets. The priests, who followed, became repositories of allegedly religious power, functioned for all practical purposes like other holders of power, practising monopoly and exercising control over the lives, conduct, and often also purses of the people who belonged to their sects." "Priests believe that there is a God, but that this God can be approached and known only through them. People can enter the Holy of Holies only with the permission of the priests. You must pay them, worship them, place everything in their hands...The priests dominate you, lay down a thousand rules for you. They describe simple truths in round-about ways. They tell you stories to support their own superior position. If you want to thrive in this life or go to heaven after death, you have to pass through their hands. You have to perform all kinds of ceremonials and rituals...The prophets have

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been giving warning against the priests and their machinations and superstitions, but the vast mass of the people have not yet learned to heed these warnings—education is yet to come to them."

It is this education that Vivekananda wanted to give by preaching *Vedanta*.

Vedanta literally means the end of the *Vedas*. In actual use, however, *Vedanta* takes in not only the truths preached in the *Vedas* but also in the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Puranas* to the extent they constitute an exposition of *Bhakti* or devotion as a way of reaching God-consciousness. Thus *Vedanta* includes the concepts of both the impersonal and the personal God. The founder of the *Advaita* doctrine, the great Sankara, was himself an ardent devotee and composed many songs which till today form a significant part of the treasure house of the *bhakta*; and Sri Ramakrishna gave the most concrete illustration of the twin truths of the personal and the impersonal God by his daily vision of the Divine Mother Kali whom he worshipped and of his almost daily experience of the *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* where the individual consciousness gets merged into the universal reality. Swami Vivekananda repeatedly pointed out in his lectures and discussions that it is wrong to identify *Vedanta* exclusively with the *Advaita* doctrine and that the three *Prasthanas*, namely the *Upanishads*, the *Vyasa Sutras* and the *Gita* were treated as the authority for their doctrine not only by the *Advaitins* but also by the *Dwaitins* and *Vishistadwaitins*. Sankara, Ramanuja and Madhwa all accepted the authority of the three *Prasthanas* but the commentaries they wrote which constitute their separate doctrines were based on what Vivekananda called "text-torturing" with the result that they created different Hindu sects instead of unifying them as one single body of *Vedantins*. The same treatment has been given to the *Gita* in spite of the prominence it gives to *Karma Yoga* and *Bhakti Yoga* in addition of course to *Jnana Yoga* with in fact the edge on *bhakti* rather than on the other two as paths to God-realisation. The *Vedanta* that Vivekananda preached

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therefore was not pure *Advaita* but a combination of both *Advaita* and *Dwaita*, with knowledge, work and devotion all playing their part in realisation, according to the nature and need of the individual concerned but with none of them wholly excluding the other, and all leading to the same ethic in respect of the individual's relations with his fellow human beings. He called the religion he preached practical *Vedanta* and brought into the discussion the concept of equality associated with Islam, of service associated with Christianity, and of compassion associated with Buddhism, in addition of course, to non-attachment and renunciation associated with Hinduism.

Vivekananda however did not make his practical *Vedanta* into a new religion to replace all existing religions. On the contrary, he found practical *Vedanta* immanent in all religions, either implicitly or explicitly, with only shades of difference in the values and ways of life generated in the practice of *Vedanta* and with degrees of preference for one or other of these values and ways of life depending upon the special aspect which a prophet or founder of a religion chose to emphasise. Vivekananda did not want to propagate a religion that should replace all existing religions, but he did want the universalising of the Religion that he found existing in all religions. He did not plead for one universal philosophy or one universal mythology or one universal ritual, for he knew that this would be impossible in this world of natural necessity of variations. He insisted that truth may be expressed in a thousand different ways and yet be true as far as it goes. And the same thing can be viewed from a hundred different standpoints and yet be the same thing. What was needed was harmony among the different faiths, the recognition of unity in diversity, and non-resort to hatred, bigotry and fanaticism in the search for God. He said, "Say not a word against a man's convictions so far as they are sincere. Take the man from where he stands and from there give him a lift. If it be true that God is the centre of all religions and that each of us is

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moving along one of those radii, then it is certain that all of us must reach that centre. And at the centre, where all radii will meet, all our differences will cease."

Vivekananda concluded his discussion of the universality of religion and the existence of many religions with the following words: "Our watchword will be acceptance and not exclusion. Not only toleration, but acceptance. Toleration means that I think that you are wrong and I am just allowing you to live. I believe in acceptance. I accept all religions that were in the past and worship them all. I worship God with every one of them, in whatever form they worship Him. I shall go to the mosque of the Mohammedan; I shall enter the Christian's church and kneel before the Crucifix; I shall take refuge in a Buddhistic temple, where I shall take refuge in Buddha and in his Law. I shall go into the forest and sit down in meditation with the Hindu, who is trying to see the Light which enlightens the heart of every one.

"Not only shall I do all these but I shall keep my heart open for all that may come in the future. Is God's book finished? Or is it still a continuous revelation, going on? It is a marvellous book—these spiritual revelations of the world, the *Bible*, the *Vedas*, the *Koran* and all other sacred books—are but so many pages, and an infinite number of pages remain yet to be unfolded. I would leave it open for all of them. We stand in the present, but open ourselves to the infinite future. We take in all that has been in the past, enjoy the light of the present and open every window of the heart for all that will come in the future. Salutation to all the prophets of the past, to all the great ones of the present, and to all that are to come in the future !"

His profound belief in the acceptance of all religions rested on the intellectual side on the *Advaitic* interpretation of the *Vedanta* and recognition of the legitimacy of all the four kinds of *Yoga* prescribed by the Hindu scriptures for the attainment of God. And on the emotional side it rested on love of God which transcends all human

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differences and includes all human beings in its scope. His great contribution was of course practical *Vedanta* which led to the same ethos and conduct for all human beings, irrespective of the nature of the belief in God and the kind of *Yoga* which was preferred for reaching Him.

The *Advaita* doctrine denied the reality of anything except God. Nature, material phenomena, individual human beings and all that exists in living or non-living form existed in human consciousness only as a result of *Maya*. It was God who existed in all phenomena and once the *Maya* was removed by *Jnana* or knowledge it was easy to recognise that. He alone was the only real but also Universal Reality. According to Vivekananda this was consistent with modern science which has taken the explanation of natural phenomena out of the hands of spirits and angels and substituted it by explanation from inside, from the very nature of the things under study. This explanation from inside means that cause and effect proceed in continuous fashion with mutual interaction, the potential effect being present in the cause itself and leading to evolution from within rather than creation from without. *Advaitism* takes the same line, regarding the world as self-creating, self-dissolving and self-manifesting, while the cause for change is sought out of the nature of the world itself rather than in the work of any outside genius or an extra-cosmic God. The only difference is that while science does not talk of God and regards matter and change as of the very nature of things, *Advaita* would say all this change is caused by *Maya* and it is God who is the only Universal Reality and He exists in all phenomena. According to Vivekananda, all *Vedantins* believe that all matter throughout the universe is the outcome of the primal matter called *Akasha*; and all force, whether gravitation, attraction or repulsion, or life is the outcome of one primal force called *Prana*. *Prana* acting on *Akasha* is creating or projecting the universe. But there is something beyond *Akasha* and *Prana*. Both can be resolved into a third thing called *Mahat* - the cosmic Mind. This

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cosmic Mind does not create *Akasha* and *Prana* but changes itself into them. The difference comes when the Dualist *Vedantin* claims separate identity in perpetuity for nature, individual souls and God, while the *Advaitin Vedantists* generalised the whole universe into one, claiming that it is but one Being manifesting itself in all that exists in various forms, whether animate or inanimate, animal, man, soul or Nature. They claimed that the whole universe is the Supreme Being unchanged and that the changes we see are only appearances caused by *Desha*, *Kala* and *Nimitta* (shape, time and causation). According to a higher psychological formulation these changes are only in *Nama* and *Rupa* (name and form) and it is only by name and form that one thing is differentiated from another. And they say that *Maya* or ignorance is the cause for all this phenomena, the Absolute and the unchangeable being taken as this manifested universe. *Maya* then is the real creator of this universe in so far as it gives name or form to the material which is *Brahman* or God, and the latter only seems to be transformed into all this phenomena. The *Advaitins* therefore had no separate place either for the individual soul or Nature in their picture of the Universal Reality; they were all but parts of that one identity. That the explanation of a thing comes from within itself is still more completely satisfied by the Vedantic thesis that the *Brahman*, the God of the *Vedanta*, has nothing outside of Himself. "All this is indeed He," says Vivekananda. "He is in the universe: He is the Universe Himself." He goes on to add: "The difference between man and man, between angels and man, between man and animals, between animals and plants, between plants and stones is not in kind but only in degree." They are all manifestations of the *Brahman*, only in some the manifestation of it is of a lower order while in others it is of a higher order. This is especially true of human beings who are all manifestations of the *Brahman*. But this manifestation is hidden from them, to a smaller or larger extent, by *Maya* and the life and conduct of the human being, his

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good and bad thoughts, his good and bad deeds, and the discipline and persistence with which he seeks to acquire true knowledge of the Universal Reality. From a lower to a higher stage of manifestation, which really means a lower or higher stage of understanding, is really the evolution of man from the human to the divine. In fact, says the *Advaita*, man himself is divine. *Tat Twam Asi*—Thou art That—but he does not know it because of *Maya*. *Maya* is able to keep him in ignorance because he does not make the necessary effort to remove the veil of ignorance of his real nature by practising *yoga*, renouncing the fruits of his action and surrendering himself to the love of God. All the same, he has in him the same divinity that sages and saints have and they are all the same in so far as they are all but the manifestations of the Divine.

Vivekananda admits that this *Advaita* or non-Dualistic *Vedanta* is too abstruse to be understood easily and too elevated to be the religion of the masses. All the same it is the truth and it is this truth which makes not only for the oneness of all humanity but also for its basic sameness. It is on this foundation that he builds up his ethical code and preaches equal respect for all religions, love of all human beings, service of those in need, renunciation of the fruits of action, and denial of the personal ego. And he draws on the lives of prophets, saints, seers, *rishis*, and godly householders of the world to cite them as an illustration of conscious or unconscious acceptance of their identity as the Divine and the ethical code they consequently follow. And to those who want to shake off the veil of *Maya* and recognise their identity as the Divine —*Tat Twam Asi*—he preaches the *Raja Yoga* and the *Jnana Yoga* for their understanding and practising under guidance as the path to the unfolding of their real self.

Vivekananda's religious teaching was however not confined only to the non-Dualistic *Vedanta* or *Advaita*. He also preached Dualistic *Vedanta* with its concept of the Personal God as an equally efficient and perhaps less difficult way of realisation and the attain-

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ment of God-consciousness. *Bhakti Yoga* is the method that has to be followed for this purpose.

"*Bhakti Yoga*", says Vivekananda, "is real, genuine search for the Lord, a search beginning, continuing and ending in love." He quotes Narada: "*Bhakti* is intense love of God. When a man gets it he loves all, hates none; he becomes satisfied forever." While Vivekananda hailed the *Bhakti Marga* as the easiest and most natural way to reach God-consciousness, he was also aware that in its lower forms it often degenerates into hideous fanaticism. When one is not aware of the unity in diversity that God represents, single attachment to a loved object is also often the cause of the denunciation of everything else. He adds: "Herein is the explanation of why the same man who is so lovingly attached to his own ideal of God, so devoted to his own ideal of religion, becomes a howling fanatic as soon as he hears anything of any other idea. The same man, who is kind, good, honest and loving to people of his own opinion, will not hesitate to do the vilest deeds when they are directed against persons who are beyond the pale of his own religious brotherhood." This is what the Hindu scriptures call the *Gowree* or the preparatory stage in *Bhakti*.

Beyond this stage however comes the superior stage or *Para Bhakti*, when *Bhakti* gets transformed into pure love which sees no distinction between man and man and indeed between man and all other creation. When this stage is reached, then fanaticism and bigotry vanish, the *Bhakta* seeing God in all reality, and recognising this universal identity similar to what the *Jnani* has arrived at by his *Advaita* knowledge and *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*, but with the added advantage that it also enables him to pour out his love and get emotionally identified with the universe and his fellow-men.

Vivekananda emphasises the role of the *guru* or the teacher in the pursuit of *Bhakti Yoga*. The quickening impulse for stimulating *bhakti* cannot come from books; it has to come from another soul and that is the *guru*. He reminds us, however, that "the soul from

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which it proceeds (that is, the *guru*) must possess the power of transmitting it, as it were to another; and the soul to which it is transmitted must be fit to receive it. The seed must be a living seed, and the field must be ready and ploughed; and when both these conditions are fulfilled, a wonderful growth of genuine religion takes place."

He warns us however to be careful in the choice of the *guru*. "There are many", he says "who though immersed in ignorance, yet in their pride, fancy they know everything and not only do not stop there but offer to take others on their shoulders; and thus, the blind leading the blind, both fall into the ditch." And he quotes an ancient Sanskrit text which says, "Fools dwelling in darkness, wise in their own conceit and puffed up with vain knowledge, go round and round, staggering to and fro, like blind men led by the blind." As one who has been functioning in the educational field in one way or another for the last fifty years, I am tempted to add that this would apply not only to spiritual teachers but also to secular teaching.

Vivekananda lays down severe conditions for a *guru* to be qualified as a teacher in *Bhakti*. First of all, while he must know the scriptures he must be able to transmit its spirit rather than indulge in "text-torturing" and playing upon the meaning of words, their roots, and their diverse conjunctions. He quoted in this context a story told by his Master of how some men went into a mango orchard and busied themselves counting the leaves, the twigs and the branches, examining their colour, comparing their size and noting down everything most carefully and then got up a learned discussion on each of these topics. But one of them, more sensible than the others, straightaway began to eat the mango fruit.

The second condition he mentioned was the need for sinlessness in the teacher. His practice in living must be an expression rather than a contradiction of professions regarding the path of *Bhakti*. "Hence", says Vivekananda, "with the teacher of religion we must first see what he is and then what he says". The third condition is

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in regard to the motive. He says, "The teacher must not teach with any ulterior selfish motive, for money, name or fame; his work must be simply out of love, out of pure love for mankind at large. God is love, and only he who has known God as love can be a teacher of godliness and God to man."

The taught also have to fulfil certain conditions. Vivekananda says that "the conditions necessary for the taught are purity, a real thirst for knowledge, and perseverance. Hearing religious talks, reading religious books is no proof yet of a real want felt in the heart; there must be a continuous struggle, a constant fight, an unremitting fight with our lower nature, till the higher want is actually felt and victory is reached. The major requirement in a student who wants to take to the *Bhakti Yoga* is thus persistence in quest, effort to overcome one's material desires, and attempt to lead a life free as far as possible from selfishness and impure habits."

As regards the method and means of *Bhakti Yoga*, Vivekananda quotes from the commentary of Sri Ramanuja on the *Vedanta Sutras*: "The attaining of that comes from discrimination, controlling the passions, practice, sacrificial work, purity, strength and suppression of excessive joy." Ramanuja interprets discrimination, among other things, to prefer pure food to the impure. The same word *ahara* is interpreted by Sankara to mean the acquiring of the knowledge of sensations...by the defects of attachment, aversion and delusion. As regards controlling the passions, the stress is on restraining the *indriyas* (organs) from going towards the object of the senses, controlling them and bringing them under the guidance of the will. Then comes the practice of self-restraint and self-denial. The next is purity, which Vivekananda says is the bed-rock for *Bhakti*-building and which Ramanuja identifies with the cultivation of the qualities of *Satya* (truthfulness), *Daya* (doing good to others without postulating a personal gain), *Ahimsa* (not injuring others by thought, word or deed), *Abhidya* (not coveting others' goods, not thinking vain thoughts, and not brooding over injuries received from another),

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Anavasada (attainment of strength by the elimination of both physical and mental weakness), and finally, *Anuddharha* (which really means keeping the mind in a steady and peaceful condition instead of getting it disturbed either by excessive hilarity or undue seriousness leading to gloom).

Looking to the list of requirements needed in both the teacher and the disciple and the methods and means considered necessary for cultivating *Bhakti*, one wonders how Vivekananda treats *Bhakti Yoga* as an easier way than *Jnana Yoga* for the attainment of God consciousness. I suppose it is a matter of comparative costs. But more important is that the *Bhakti Marga* follows the path of life which is a more natural way for a human being than austerity and renunciation for the sake of realising an abstract principle. Love is natural to the human being, love of the lover for the beloved, of the mother for the child, of the boy for his playmate, of the brother for his brother or sister, of the patriot for his country, of the artist for his art and so on. All such love does lead to a measure of self-abnegation and renunciation in favour of the beloved. The only snag is that when this love is directed towards a particular human being, it becomes exclusive and leads to indifference to other human beings, violation of other people's interests, and jealousy or even hatred of other than the loved ones. But the essence is love, the rest being accretions caused by the working of the individual's ego. One may call it therefore a lower form of love. When this is conceded, what *Bhakti* involves is the development of this love into its higher form of the love of God and the dropping of the accretions associated with love of particular individuals. On the religious or spiritual plane, it means the dropping of the exclusiveness associated with the love of restricted ideals or individual gods, and the broadening of the earlier exclusive love into the love of God as the Universal Reality and of all human beings as his manifestations. Thus *Bhakti* involves a passage from the restricted and exclusive love to a broader and more universal love till it reaches

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the stage when the whole universe is wrapped up in love as the manifestation of God. And the renunciation which man is prepared to make for the particular he now makes for the universal. Referring to such a man who attained *Para Bhakti* or Supreme Devotion, Vivekananda says, "He alone has attained that supreme state of love commonly called the brotherhood of man; the rest only talk. He sees no distinctions and sees not man in men but beholds his Beloved everywhere." Through every face shines to him his Hari (Hari is the name given to the Supreme God in the Hindu dictionary and literally means the magnet). Vivekananda therefore describes *Bhakti Yoga* as the science of higher love. He represents love as a triangle, the three angles of which stand for the three inseparable characteristics of love. One is that love knows no bargaining and seeks nothing in return even from God. The second is that it knows no fear of the beloved, those who say they love God only because of their fear of Him being described by Vivekananda as "the lowest of human beings, quite underdeveloped as men". The third angle is that love knows no rival, the lover's highest ideal being seen by him as embodied in his love.

When the *Bhakta* reaches the highest stage of this *Para Bhakti*, he throws away all other ideals such as freedom, salvation, *Nirvana* and only wants to be born again and again in order to have and experience God as his only love. His state is thus described by Vivekananda: " 'Who cares to become sugar' says the *Bhakta*, 'I want to taste sugar. I may know that I am He, yet I will take myself away from Him and become different, so that I may enjoy the Beloved'." Vivekananda concludes his discussion on *Bhakti Yoga*: "We all have to begin as dualists in the religion of love. Man takes up all the various relationships of life, as father, mother, son, friends, master and as lover, and projects them on his ideal of love, on his God. To him God exists in all these and the last point of his progress is reached when he feels that he has become absolutely merged in the object of his worship."

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Though *Bhakti Yoga* is a path different from *Jnana Yoga* and *Raja Yoga*, yet it leads to the same result as far as the individual's conduct and his relations with other human beings are concerned. He goes in for renunciation and abnegation of his ego, and regards all human beings as same and equal, making them all the object of his love and service.

Another aspect of religion that Vivekananda preached was God-realisation through work or the *Karma Yoga*. *Karma* means work or activity; and everything we do, physical or mental is *Karma*. All the action we see in the world is the manifestation of the will of man, says Vivekananda, and this will be caused by character, and character is manufactured by *Karma*. The motivation behind work colours the development of his ego and influences his character. Most people work for the sake of name and fame or money or power or wanting to go to heaven. But the higher stage of work is reached when work is undertaken only for the sake of work and not for that of material or other personal rewards. And this transition will come when, with whatever stage of motivation we begin our work, we also try to find out the motive power that prompts us and deliberately try to change it in a higher direction. Vivekananda concedes that in the first years, almost without exception, the motives will be found to be selfish but adds that "gradually this selfishness will melt by persistence, till at last will come the time when we shall be able to do really unselfish work". When that happens, the *Karma Yogi* will take his place with the *Jnana Yogi* and the *Bhakti Yogi* in his ability to achieve realisation or God-consciousness.

Vivekananda's treatment of work as a *Yoga* is distinguished by the same catholicity of outlook that he brings to his discussion of the many religions that people profess. Different human beings have different combinations of qualities and attitudes and therefore are inclined to do different types of work. There is no such thing as inferior or superior work according to Vivekananda. It is the spirit in which they do their work which gives them *Bhakti*. Simi-

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larly also there are varied versions of duty, differing according to different walks in life, dif erent historical periods, and different nations. Vivekananda says that an objective definition of duty is almost impossible. But from the subjective point of view, certain acts have a tendency to exalt and ennoble the doer, while some others tend to degrade and brutalise him. Here also it may be difficult to be categorical about which acts have what tendency in relation to persons of different sorts and conditions. It is therefore necessary to see the duty of others through their own eyes and refrain from judging the customs of other peoples by our own standards. As Vivekananda puts it, "The apple tree should not be judged by the standard of the oak nor the oak by that of the apple. To judge the apple tree you must take the apple standard and for the oak, its own standard." But he refers to one idea of duty which has been universally accepted in all ages and by all sects and countries and that is *Ahimsa* or non-injury, and quotes in this connection an old Sanskrit aphorism: "Do not injure any being; not injuring any person is virtue, injuring any being is sin."

Thus one attribute of work that will lead to *Bhakti* is that of non-injury to others.

Vivekananda then refers to the concept of duty to others as helping others and doing good to the world. While doing good is important, as the desire to do good is the highest motive power that action can have, he points out that it is not the receiver who is blessed but the giver, "Be grateful to the man you help", he says: "Think of him as God. Is it not a great privilege to be allowed to worship God by helping our fellow-men?" By trying to do good to others through constant effort, Vivekananda points out that we are also trying to forget ourselves; and it is this forgetfulness of self that leads to *Bhakti*. The highest ideal is eternal and entire self-abnegation, where there is no 'I', but all is 'thou'; and *Karma Yoga* leads man to that end, whether he is conscious of it or not. It is

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in self-abnegation that all the three *Yogas*, *Jnana*, *Bhakti* and *Karma* meet at one point; and all lead to realisation.

Vivekananda then takes up the problem resulting from the fact that there is no action which does not bear good and evil results at the same time. Does it then follow that perfection can never be attained by work? He finds the solution in the *Gita* with its theory of non-attachment, and says that when one has acquired this feeling of non-attachment and non-expectation of any return, then there will be neither good nor evil for him in his action. And by this non-attachment he will be free from the power of any action of his to act upon himself. When the doer has thus practised control over himself, his mind becomes free and he acquires utter unselfishness. Vivekananda adds that this attainment does not depend upon any dogma, or doctrine or belief and it does not matter whether one is a Christian or Jew or Gentile. And the *Yoga* of work is as capable of serving as a direct and independent means for the attainment of *Moksha* as the *Yogas* of knowledge and of devotion.

Unlike the *Jnana Yoga* which is characterised by the refusal to do any work, *Karma Yoga* calls for incessant work. But the work has to be without attachment, for attachment brings about identification and with it pain and misery. It is the sense of possession that causes selfishness. Therefore, points out Vivekananda, "The *Karma Yoga* says, first destroy the tendency to project this tentacle of selfishness, and when you have the power of checking it, hold it in and do not allow the mind to get into the ways of selfishness. Then you may go out into the world and work as much as you can."

There are two ways of giving up this attachment. Those who do not believe in God or any outside help, have to work on their own will, with the powers of their mind and sense of discrimination, saying "I must be non-attached". For those who believe in God, however, and especially in a personal God, the way is much easier. All they have to do is to surrender the fruits of work unto the Lord

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and automatically get detached from the results of their work. When this is done, even the concept of duty, which after all means work under some kind of compulsion and therefore goes to build up attachment, goes over board and what is left is only an implementation of the Christian Prayer "Thy will be mine" or of the Hindu concept of worship by surrendering all action and its fruits at the feet of the Lord.

The *Karma Yoga* therefore automatically leads to the morality "That which is selfish is immoral, and that which is unselfish is moral". It is true that what is considered moral conduct in one country may even be considered immoral in another because of different circumstances. But this does not alter the fact that their code of ethics has the same central idea, namely, not to think of self but give up the self.

Vivekananda concludes his discussion of *Karma Yoga* with this statement:

"*Karma Yoga*, therefore, is a system of ethics and religion intended to attain freedom through unselfishness, and by good work. The *Karmayogi* need not believe in any doctrine whatever. He may not believe even in God, may not ask what his soul is, nor think of any metaphysical speculation. He has got his own special aim of realising selflessness; and he has to work it out himself. Every moment of his life must be realisation, because he has to solve by mere work, without the help of doctrine or theory, the very same problem to which the *Jnani* applied his reason and inspiration and the *Bhakta* with love."

Vivekananda then talked about the Buddha as the most perfect practitioner of *Karma Yoga*. He was the only prophet who said: "I do not care to know about your various theories about God. What is the use of discussing all the subtle doctrines about the soul? *Do good and be good* (italics mine). And this will take you to freedom and to whatever truth there is." He was the first who dared

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to say: "Believe not because some old manuscripts are produced, believe not because it is your national belief, because you have been made to believe it from childhood; but reason it all out, and after you have analysed it, believe it, live upto it, and help others to live upto it." Vivekananda concludes: "He works best who works without any motive, neither for money nor for fame nor for anything else; and when a man can do that, he will be a Buddha. This man represents the very highest ideal of *Karma Yoga*."

Vivekananda's treatment of *Karma Yoga* not only provides the moral imperative for the daily life and work of the individual, but also gives the philosophic justification to the modern plea for "social work" as a necessary part of all work. While position, power, livelihood and personal satisfaction are bound to continue to motivate individuals in the work they undertake, they can add a spiritual flavour to their work by approaching it in a spirit of duty and devotion, and as a means of discharging their debt to society even though it may not be possible for them to regard work as its own reward. When it comes to what is technically termed "social work" or work for the alleviation of human suffering in one form or another, the relevance of Vivekananda's conception of *Karma Yoga* becomes even more crucial. *Karma Yoga* does not countenance the undertaking of "social work" either in a spirit of patronage or out of a feeling of self-righteous superiority or as a sop to one's ego. It enjoins on the other hand, that if social work is undertaken, it should be in a spirit of humilty and thankfulness to God for the opportunity He has given them for their own moral and spiritual development. Only then will social work lose its donor-client relationship and get real spiritual significance and result in the betterment of both benefactor and the beneficiary. While modern India has seen considerable enlargement of the quantum of social work, it has still to give it this spirit of the *Karma Yoga*.

Vivekananda's religious teaching was not confined only to the

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dualistic and non-dualistic truths given in the *Vedanta* or to the personalised version given in the *Gita* or even to Buddhism which on its intellectual side had a close family resemblance to the *Advaita* doctrine of the *Vedanta*. He also brought within his field the teachings of Christ and Mohammed, Christianity and Islam. To him Mohammed was the prophet of equality and of the brotherhood of man, though as interpreted by his followers the brotherhood was confined only to the Muslims. Christ was the prophet of renunciattion and of service of the poor and the disinherited. When a rich young man asked him "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" Jesus replied: "Sell whatever thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, take up thy cross, and follow me." He himself had no property, for did he not say: "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath nowhere to lay his head." Vivekananda finds the spirit of *Advaita* speaking in Him when he told his disciples: "I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you". And Jesus Christ wanted men to prepare themselves by their conduct and thinking in this very life so that they could be fit for the heaven that was so near, and yet so far, from them. "Be ready", he said, "for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." The message of Jesus was renunciation of self-regarding activity and practice of love through the service of man.

Thus Vivekananda brought to the impersonal teaching of *Vedanta* found in the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* the personalised codification of the *Vedanta* given by Sri Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* and its popularised and illustrated versions given in the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Bhagavata* and other *Puranas*. This he strengthened and enriched by drawing on Mohammed's ideal of equality, Buddha's ideal of compassion and Christ's ideal of renunciation and service. And he found the unity and culmination of all in the life and teachings of his beloved Master, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa,

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who was himself an embodiment of *Jnana Yoga*, *Karma Yoga*, and *Bhakti Yoga*, who spoke of God from his own personal realisation finding him both with form and without form, and who did not preach a special religion to bear his name because he had realised that, in reality, all religions are part and parcel of the One Eternal Religion.

Vivekananda's teachings on religion can be summed up as under :

God is the one reality that exists in the world and He is the Universal Reality. All phenomena, animate and inanimate, man and animal, body, mind and soul, are all His manifestations. Therefore, there is no difference between man and man in his basic essence and this should lead to all men feeling about and treating each other as they would do with their own individual selves. This understanding of the real nature of man, the universe, and God is however hidden from man because of the veil cast by *Maya*; and it is the objective of *Vedanta* to tear this veil and let man see himself in reality. And this can be done through learning and practising *Jnana Yoga* or *Raja Yoga*. The *Vedanta* however does not only propound the *Advaita* doctrine. It also puts forward the dualistic understanding of God through the worship of the Personal God or one's *Ishta Devata*. This *Bhakti Yoga*, though easier than *Jnana* or *Raja Yoga* because it proceeds on man's natural feeling for loving one's nearest and dearest, is yet a difficult process, as one has to develop from the lower levels of *Gowree* or preparatory *Bhakti* to the higher levels of *Para Bhakti* when alone the individual attains God-consciousness. And for doing this, he has to find a *guru* who has the power to transmit spirituality, while he himself should be fit to receive and get stimulated by this transmission. When a man reaches this stage he gets filled with overwhelming love for God and the universe which he finds enveloped with God and for all men whom he finds are but manifestations of his Personal God. His religion thus leads him to love all men and find in their service his

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means for worshipping God. There is yet a third method of obtaining liberation from the shackles of one's ego and reaching God-consciousness. And this is *Karma Yoga*, the gospel of work without attachment, without selfishness, and for the service of one's fellowmen. Even if one does not believe in God, one can follow the path of *Karma Yoga* and obtain liberation, harmony, and the peace that passeth all understanding as was shown by Buddha. To these he added the teachings of Buddha, Christ and Mohammed with their special stress on compassion, service and equality. And he concluded by talking of One, who he felt, was the perfect example in actual life of all that he taught, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa.

To Vivekananda, religion was not just a question of belief. "Religion", he said "was realisation, not talk, not doctrine, nor theories however beautiful they may be: It is being and becoming; not hearing and acknowledging. It is the whole soul becoming changed into what it believes. That is Religion. Religion has to be practised if it was to have meaning, and the practice had to take account of the call of social reality. In a letter written from Washington on October 27, 1894, he made his position very clear. I quote: "I do not believe in a God or religion which cannot wipe the widow's tears or bring a piece of bread to the orphan's mouth. However sublime the theories, however well spun may be the philosophy, I do not call it religion as long as it is confined to books and dogmas. The eye is in the forehead and not in the back. Move onward and carry into practice that which you are very proud to call your religion, and may God bless you."

The essence of Vivekananda's teachings on religion was the universality of God and his accessibility both in form and without form, the divinity of man, respect and understanding of all religions, the equality and brotherhood of men, the supreme virtue of compassion, work without attachment, devotion without return, renunci-

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ation of the personal ego, and service of all men and especially of those who were poor or maimed or illiterate or disinherited, the *daridra-narayanas* of this world.

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XI

Vedantic Socialism

VIVEKANANDA DID NOT teach religion as a water-tight compartment. He treated religion as coextensive with life and wanted it to influence the social and economic ideals of the people and their daily conduct and activity. In his own words, "Theory may be very good indeed, but if it be absolutely impracticable, no theory is of any value whatever except as intellectual gymnastics. The *Vedanta*, therefore, as a religion, must be intensely practical. We must be able to carry it out in every part of our lives. The ideals of religion must cover the whole field of life, they must enter into all our thoughts, and more, more and more into practice." He, therefore, called his religion "Practical *Vedanta*". As we shall see, this "Practical *Vedanta*" turned out in its detailed exposition, as far as social relations and individual conduct were concerned, to have a close resemblance to what was being preached in the name of socialism. Of course, there were many differences in the motivation and methodology of implementation between "Practical *Vedanta*" and what goes under the generic name of socialism. But in its historical reasoning, as well as in the end product and social relations it envisages, "Practical *Vedanta*" does have a lot in common with some varieties of socialism like democratic socialism and Gandhian Socialism. In fact, I would go so far as to suggest that Gandhian

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Socialism owed a lot to and stemmed from Vivekananda's "Practical *Vedanta*." It is therefore that I have ventured to give the title of *Vedantic* Socialism to the "Practical *Vedanta*" which Vivekananda was preaching as a concrete and behavioural version of the *Vedanta* of ancient Indian origin.

There is no doubt that in giving a practical form to *Vedanta*, Vivekananda was influenced by what he saw of the country and its people during the period he wandered over India as a *Parivrajaka* or itinerant monk. Intellectually he was undoubtedly an *Advaitin Vedantin* and a votary of *Jnana Yoga*. But emotionally he was a *bhakta* deeply influenced by the dualistic interpretation of the *Vedanta* and its concept of a Personal God to be both wooed and retained by love. And it was his heart which was moved by what he saw and responded to the overwhelming need of his people for economic and social betterment. As he told his fellow monk, Swami Turiyananda who met him along with Swami Brahmananda at Abu Road Station during his pilgrimage allover India, "Haribhai, I am still unable to understand anything of your so-called religion. But my heart has expanded and I have learnt to feel. Believe me, I feel intensely indeed." It was through his contact with the Indian masses, their poverty, illiteracy, superstition and social degradation, that he was moved to fierce anger at the social system that permitted a few to exploit the many. He was appalled by the divorce that he found between this reality and the intellectual acceptance of the *Advaita* doctrine of the basic sameness and equality of all human beings as manifestations of the Divine in smaller or larger measure. His distress at what he saw was heightened by his *Puranic* concept of *Bhakti* which identified love for God with love for all human beings. And his belief in the *Karma Yoga* gave him the strength to look up to incessant work in the service of the poor as the motivation for all work. He was so profoundly impressed by the practical implications that he saw in the rich variety of

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the *Vedanta* that he had learnt from his Master that he was prepared to discount the accepted path of withdrawal from the world and shutting one's eyes to its misery that *sanyasins* have followed in the past. His inspired understanding of *Vedanta* as a practical religion made him feel that the traditional Hindu belief in *Moksha* as a kind of personal liberation or salvation was really based on selfishness and constituted a surrender to the personal ego. He was convinced that God was not some one to be sought for from outside this world. His knowledge of *Vedanta* told him that, in fact, God was manifest in all human beings and, especially so, in the poor and the suffering for whom he coined the new word *daridra-narayanas*. He was sure that serving them was the best way for finding Him. This revolutionary change in traditional thinking is forcefully brought out in a letter that he wrote to a western friend on July 9, 1897. I quote : "I have lost all wish for my salvation. I never wanted earthly enjoyments. I must see my machine in strong working order, and then knowing surely that I have put in a lever for the good of humanity, in India at least, which no power can drive back, I will sleep, without caring what will be next. And may I be born again and again, and suffer thousands of miseries, so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the sum total of all souls—and, above all, my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of all species, is the special object of my worship."

Earlier, in a letter written from Chicago in November 1894 to an Indian friend, Vivekananda says: "Let each one of us pray day and night for the downtrodden millions of India who are held fast by poverty, priest-craft and tyranny. I am no metaphysician no philosopher, nay no saint. But I am poor. I love the poor. Who feels for the two hundred millions of men and women sunken for ever in poverty and ignorance? Who feels for them? They cannot find light or education. Who will bring light to them, who

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will travel from door to door bringing education to them? Him I call a *Mahatma* whose heart bleeds for the poor, otherwise he is a *Duratma*. So long as the millions live in hunger and ignorance, I hold every man a traitor who, having been educated at their expense, pays not the least heed to them. I call those men who strut about in their finery, having got all their money by grinding the poor, wretches, so long as they do not do anything for these two hundred millions who are now no better than hungry savages." He had written to a friend in Madras on August 20, 1893 accusing his critics of indifference to the misery, degradation and poverty that had filled the Indian world as a result of centuries of oppression: "They little dream of the ages of tyranny, mental, moral, and physical, that has reduced the image of God to a mere beast of burden; the emblem of the Divine Mother, a slave to bear their children, and life itself a curse." "Trust not the so-called rich", he wrote, "The hope lies in you—in the weak, the lowly but the faithful. Have faith in the Lord. Feel for the miserable and look up for help—it shall come. I have travelled 12 years with this load in my heart and this idea in my head. With a bleeding heart I have crossed half the world to this strange land seeking for help. I may perish of cold or hunger in this land, but I bequeath to you, young men, this sympathy, this struggle for the poor, the ignorant, the oppressed. It is not the work of a day and the path is full of the most deadly thorns. But Parthasarathy (Krishna as Arjuna's charioteer worshipped in that form in Madras) is ready to be our *sarathi* (charioteer). In His name and with eternal faith in Him, set fire to the mountain of misery that has been heaped upon India for ages, and it shall be burned down. Hundreds will fall in the struggle, hundreds will be ready to take it up. Do not look up to the so-called rich and great; do not care for the heartless intellectual writers, and their cold-blooded newspaper articles. Faith, sympathy—fiery faith and fiery sympathy. March on, the Lord is our General. Do not

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look back to see who falls—forward—onward! Thus and thus we shall go on, brethren. One falls and another takes up the work."

Calling himself a *tyagi* monk in another letter (written on October 27, 1894) he decried the confining of religion to books, dogmas, and philosophy and declared "I do not believe in a God or religion which cannot wipe the widow's tears or bring a piece of bread to the orphan's mouth. Where should you go to seek God—are not all the poor, the miserable, the weak, Gods? Why not worship them first ? I believe in God and I believe in man. I believe in helping the miserable. I believe even in going to hell to save others." During the same year, he wrote to an Indian follower who was wanting to become a monk "The *gerua* robe is not for enjoyment. It is the banner for heroic work. You must give your body, mind and speech to the welfare of the world. You have read—*Matru Devo Bhava*, *Pitru Devo Bhava* (ancient Indian text addressed to new graduates) meaning 'Look upon your mother as God, look upon your father as God', but I say *daridra devo bhava*, *moorkha devo bhava*, meaning 'the poor, the illiterate, the ignorant, the afflicted—let these be your God'. Know that service to these alone is the highest religion."

In another letter, this time from Darjeeling on April 6, 1897, he writes: "I heard in Japan that it was the belief of the girls of that country that their dolls would be animated if they were loved with all their heart. I too believe that India will awake again if any one could love with all his heart the people of this country. Then only will India awake, when hundreds of large-hearted men and women, giving up all desires of enjoying the luxuries of life, will long and exert themselves to their utmost for the well-being of the millions of their countrymen who are gradually sinking lower and lower in the vortex of destruction and ignorance."

Vivekananda spent his all too short a life on this earth seeing missionaries who would fight as soldiers for the abolition of poverty

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and for the service of the *daridra-narayana* as their way of worship of God.

Vivekananda's *Vedantic* socialism showed itself in his formulation of the ideal of patriotism. While he was immensely proud of the country's philosophic and cultural heritage, he was also fully aware of the disastrous results it had produced on the condition of the Indian masses. He was therefore of the definite view that the country was not just a geographical entity or a philosophic concept but essentially meant its people; and people meant the vast majority of its masses rather than the small minority of its classes. Patriotism should therefore show itself in what was being done in actual fact to serve the interests of the masses and improve their social and economic condition rather than on intellectual diatribes against the past or paper reforms or, at the other end, the use of religion and orthodoxy as an alibi for the status-quo. The essence of Vivekananda's patriotism was the great love he bore for his people. It was not however a blind or un-discriminating love. He saw the defects of his countrymen more sharply and clearly than the most hostile of his country's critics, but this did not make him waver in his love for the masses. Love was not a time-server or an opportunist but came out at its best when the beloved was most trying in its demands. He boldy declared his belief in patriotism but added that he had his own ideal of patriotism. His patriotism needed three things for its practical implementation. One was passionate love for the masses. The second was the finding of practical solution for their problems instead of reforms on paper. And the third was the strength of will to overcome the obstructions to the implementation of these solutions. It is best to quote from the first speech which he delivered at Madras on his return from America on "My Plan of Campaign".

"First feel from the heart. Do you feel that millions and millions of the descendants of gods and of sages have become next door

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neighbours to brutes? Do you feel that millions are starving today and millions have been starving for ages? Do you feel that ignorance has come over the land as a dark cloud? Does it make you restless? Does it make you sleepless? Has it gone into your blood, coursing through your veins, becoming consonant with your heartbeats? Has it made you almost mad? Are you seized with that one idea of the misery of ruin and have you forgotten all about your name, your fame, your wives, your children, your property, even your own bodies. Have you done that? That is the first step to become a patriot. The very first step.

"You may feel. But instead of spending your energies in frothy talk, have you found any way out, any practical solution, some help instead of condemnation, to bring them out of this living death ?

"That is not all. Have you got the will to surmount mountain-high obstructions? If your wives and children are against you, if all your money goes, your name dies, your wealth vanishes, would you still stick to it? Have you got that steadfastness ?

"If you have these three things, each one of you will work miracles."

Speaking on the future of India, he told his listeners: "For the next 50 years this alone should be our keynote, this our great Mother India. Let all other vain gods disappear for that time from our minds. This is the only God that is awake. All other gods are sleeping. What vain gods shall we go after and yet cannot worship the God that we see all around us, the *Virat*. These are all our Gods—men and animals, and the first Gods we have to worship, instead of being jealous of each other and fighting each other."

Many decades have passed since Vivekananda gave this message to the nation; and so much have we failed to heed it that it

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sounds even more relevant today than when he spoke in the nine ties of the last century.

Vivekananda however did not believe in violent change or revolution by coercion. He denounced what he called the pseudo-patriots who manifested their love for the country by condemning all that it had done and wanted to build its future after completely destroying its past. He was willing to recognise that the past was a mixture of both good and evil and that what was needed was to learn from past mistakes and go forward from the good that undoubtedly came from the past of India. "This national ship", he told his countrymen, "has been ferrying millions and millions of souls across the waters of life. Today, perhaps through your own fault, it has become a little damaged, has sprung a leak"; and then asked: "Would you therefore curse it? Is it fit that you stand up and pronounce malediction upon it?" His answer as a patriot was clear and unambiguous: "If there are holes in this national ship, this society of ours, we are its children, let us go and stop the holes. Let us gladly do it with our hearts' blood, and if we cannot, then let us die. We will make a plug of our brains and put them into the ship; but condemn it, never. Say not one harsh word against this society." What greater love can there be than one that perceives the faults in the beloved and would go all out to rectify them but not convert love into hatred or condemn the beloved because of the sins of omission and commission that one finds in her? Reform, yes; but destroy never. This is the power that love exercises over the beloved, and that was the love that Vivekananda had for his mother-land and that was his message of patriotism.

Vivekananda's *Vedantic* socialism naturally covered the social system and the need for its reconstruction to enable the masses to play their rightful role in society. He was fully aware of the denigration of the masses that the Hindu social system had brought about over the centuries; but he was not prepared to go in for an

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unqualified condemnation of the past nor to seek for a wholesale destruction of all existing institutions and their replacement by a new order. He believed in retaining the nation's pride in its past and the self-respect it engendered, but wanted the past to be shorn of the components that had become irrelevant and reactionary, and build up a future on the basis of a reformed past that would retain its good and eliminate its evil. He was wise enough to see that social institutions emerge in response to the necessities of the times but outlast this necessity and then become a hindrance to social growth. Writing to a Bengali lady on January 3,1898, he said: "When the needs of the times press hard on it, society adopts certain customs for self-preservation. *Rishis* have only recorded those customs. As a man often resorts even to such means as are good for immediate self-protection but which are very injurious in the future, similarly, society also not unfrequently saves itself for the time being, but these immediate means which contributed to its preservation turn out to be terrible in the long run." "So", he said, "if it be necessary to change any social custom, the necessity underlying it should be found first of all and by altering it the custom will die of itself." He told a disciple that at all times and in all countries the *Karma-Kanda* comprising the social customs and observances change form. He had his own theory about how Hindu society got its rigidity. "In India", he wrote in replying to the congratulatory address he received from the citizens of Madras on his success in the Parliament of Religions, "religion was never shackled. No man was ever challenged in the selection of his *Ishta Devata* or his sect or his preceptor and religion grew, as it grew nowhere else. On the other hand, a fixed point was necessary to allow this infinite variation in religion, and society was chosen as that point in India. As a result society became rigid and almost immovable. For liberty is the only condition of growth." He contrasted this with the west, where the field of variation was

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society and the constant point was religion, with the result that the social organisation was splendid while the religion never rose beyond the grossest material conceptions. He went on : "In India new circumstances at the same time are persistently demanding a new adjustment of social organisation." This led to the emergence of reform societies and reformers in great number over the first three quarters of the 19th century. "While these galvanic shocks were necessary to rouse the sleeping leviathan", Vivekananda traced their failure on the mass front to their concentrated attack on Hindu religion as the source of all social evil and their demand for its destruction. He accused them of ignoring the nature of social growth, namely, that it has to be from inside out, and that all evolution is only a manifestation of the preceding involution. He felt that the desired social change would have been more effectively brought about if religion had been used as the instrument—a religion shorn of irrelevant accretions and reinterpreted in the light of its original exposition—rather than by attacking religion itself at its roots. Vivekananda was essentially a believer in evolution, using the best from the past to change the present, though he was also prepared to give hard knocks to the present to make it get rid of the unwholesome part of its heritage.

He was of course most concerned with the institution of caste which he disliked intensely but which in his opinion continued to exist because of the mistaken notion of reformers that caste was a religious institution, which led to their attacking religion in order to destroy caste. They failed because religion was the special psyche of India and mixing up caste with religion only gave a longer life to the former. Vivekananda stoutly denied the thesis of religious sanction for the caste system. He pointed out that the doctrine of caste in the *Purusha-Sukta* of the *Vedas* does not make it hereditary. If the caste system was based on special aptitudes of different individuals and if the *Brahmin* thinks that he has a special aptitude for

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spiritual culture, Vivekananda asked, "Why should he be afraid to meet a *Shudra* in the open field?" He asserted, "The caste system is opposed to the religion of *Vedanta*. Caste is a social custom and all our great preachers have tried to break it down. Caste is simply the outgrowth of the political institutions of India; it is a hereditary trade guild." "It is in the books written by priest." he said, "that madness like that of caste is to be found and not in books revealed from God." In a letter he wrote: "Religion has only to do with the soul and has no business to interfere in social matters. What business had the priests to interfere (to the misery of millions of human beings) in every social matter?" In another letter, he affirmed: "But in spite of all ravings of the priests, caste is simply a crystallised social institution, which after doing its service, is now filling the atmosphere of India with its stench, and it can only be removed by giving back to the people their lost social individuality." Writing from Almora in 1897, he said: "The conviction is growing in my mind that the idea of caste is the greatest dividing factor and the root of *Maya*—all caste, either on the principle of birth or of merit, is bondage." The fact that Vivekananda was denouncing caste even if it was based on merit shows how his *Vedanta* was moving him in the direction of what I have called *Vedantic* Socialism.

Vivekananda was also a stout opponent of privilege in any form and took caste as the supreme illustration of the doctrine of privilege. Not that he was a believer in arithmetical equality for all human beings. There were bound to be variations in the physical, mental and spiritual abilities of different human beings, but this gave no right for special privileges for those who had more of any such ability. In the course of a lecture that he gave in London on "*Vedanta* and Privilege." Vivekananda points out: "The idea of privilege is the bane of human life. Two forces, as it were, are constantly at work, one making caste and the other breaking caste; in other words,

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the one making for privilege and the other breaking down privilege. And whenever privilege is broken down, more and more light and progress came to a race. None can be *Vedantists* and at the same time admit of privilege to any one, either mental, physical or spiritual. The same power is in every man, in one manifesting itself more, in the other less; the potential is in everyone. The work of the *Advaita* therefore is to break down all these privileges." After referring to the curious fact that the land that gave birth to the *Advaita* doctrine should also be the one with the largest privilege both for the spiritual man as well as for the worldly man who claim it by birth, and to the valiant efforts made by Buddha to break down caste and privilege, Vivekananda points out: "The practical side of *Vedanta* morality is necessary as much today as it ever was, for all this privilege-claiming has become tremendously intensified with the extension of knowledge. Tremendous power is being acquired by the manufacture of machines and other appliances, and privilege is claimed today as it has never been claimed in the history of the world. That is why the *Vedanta* wants to preach against it, to break down this tyrannising over the souls of men." He said: "The enjoyment of advantage over another is privilege, and throughout the ages, the aim of morality has been its destruction. This is the work which tends towards sameness, towards unity without destroying variety." And he concluded: "Trampling on every privilege and everything in us that works for privilege, let us work for that knowledge which will bring the feeling of sameness towards all mankind." This practical *Vedanta* that Vivekananda preached was thus even more radical in its implications for human relations than what we find even in the most radical socialist doctrines; and its relevance for India today is even greater than when he preached it so many years ago.

Vivekananda was also a strong advocate of giving women their rightful place in society by removing their backwardness. Replying

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to a disciple who cast doubts on his plan to start a *math* for women disciples, Vivekananda asked him to indicate the scriptures that stated that women were not competent for knowledge and devotion. On the contrary, during the Vedic or Upanishadic times, women like Maitreyi Gargi and others had taken the place of *Rishis* through their skill in discussing about the *Brahman*. It was the priests who, during the period of degradation, when they made castes other than the *Brahmin* incompetent for the study of *Vedas*, deprived the women also of all their rights. Writing the *Smritis* etc., and binding them by hard rules, the men have turned the women into mere manufacturing machines. He told the disciple: "If you do not raise the women who are the living embodiment of the Divine Mother, don't think that you have any other way to rise." In a letter written to a Bengali disciple on December 28, 1893, he reverted to the subject, quoting Manu, "Daughters should be supported and educated with as much care as the sons" and asserted that unless the conditions of women are bettered in India, the country will continue to remain as backward as it was at the moment. He declared himself in favour of raising the age of marriage, but added that it should be accompanied by education of the right type which led to character formation, strengthening of the mind, development of the intellect, and self-reliance. In fact, he wanted education to be made available for women as much as for men. But once they are educated, it should be for them to choose their role in life and not for men to tell them what they should do. "Educate your women first" he said in a lecture, "and leave them to themselves; then they will tell you what reforms are necessary for them." Speaking on his life and mission to a select audience in California in January 27, 1900, he told the audience that the work he wanted to do for men he also wanted on parallel lines for women. "No man shall dictate to a woman", he said, "nor a woman to a man. Each one is independent. Women will work out their own destinies—much

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better too than man can ever do for them. All the mischief to women has come because men undertook to shape the destiny of women."

Thus Vivekananda used his *Vedantic* philosophy to drive home his advocacy of equality and independence for women, giving them education, removing their backwardness, and giving them the opportunity to play their rightful role in society. Certainly his practical *Vedanta* went even farther than socialism in the place it gave to women in society.

Vivekananda was a great believer in education as an instrument for human betterment. His speeches and letters are full of references to the degradation in which the masses had fallen because of the denial of literacy and education to them. And he was particularly aghast at the level of ignorance and superstition prevailing in rural areas on account of their lack of literacy and education. He was also highly critical of the educational system itself with its western bias and its lack of attention to the development of mental ability and moral character in its pupils. And he pleaded for the universalisation of literacy, development, and of mass education. He wanted a thorough reorientation of the educational system to make it an integrated man-making and character-building system, with emphasis on pride in national heritage, love for the masses, self-confidence, strength and will power, and cultivation of the mind rather than mere memory.

Vivekananda scoffed at the importance being given by the educational system to book-learning and memory-training. "Education", he said, "is not the amount of information that is put in your brain and runs riot there, undigested all your life. We must have life-building, man-making, character-making, assimilation of ideas. If education is identical with information, the libraries are the greatest sages of the world and encyclopeadias are the *rishis*." And he quoted an old Sanskrit saying *Yatha Kharaschandanabharavahi*

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bharasya vetta na tu Chandanasya which means "The ass carrying its load of sandalwood knows only the weight and not the value of the sandalwood." He wanted the assimilation of ideas, even if it was confined to a few, rather than a mere reservoir of unassimilated ideas. Not that he discounted the value of knowledge or the accumulation of information. But what was more important was the development of the mind and the training of the intellect in analysis, discrimination, and the pursuit of truth. He insisted on the importance of concentration and affirmed: "To me the very essence of education is concentration of mind, not the collection of facts. If I had to do my education once again, I would not study facts at all. I would develop the power of concentration and detachment, and then with a perfect instrument collect facts at will."

Vivekananda was also dissatisfied with some other aspects of the system of education prevalent under British rule. He resented the subtle effect it had in eroding national pride, breeding a feeling of national and personal weakness, and preventing the development of that spirit of self-confidence and self-reliance, without which there could be no national growth and development. He did not like the class confines within which it largely functioned leaving out of its sphere the masses who so badly needed literacy and education for lifting themselves up from the morass of poverty, ignorance and humiliation in which they had lived for centuries.

Nor did he like the way in which ancient Indian history had suffered by neglecting to approach it on a scientific basis. "Learn accuracy my boys", he said, "Study and labour so that you can put our history on a scientific basis. For now Indian history is disorganised. It has no chronological accuracy. The history of our country written by English writers cannot but be weakening to our minds, for they only tell of our downfall. How can foreigners who understand very little of our manners and customs or of our religion

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and philosophy write faithful and unbiased histories of India? Nevertheless Europeans have shown us how to proceed in making researches into our ancient history. Now it is for us to strike out an independent path of historical research for ourselves and write accurate, sympathetic and soul-inspiring histories of the land. It is for Indians to write Indian history."

While he welcomed the bias that he found in western education towards science and technology, he was unhappy that, in the type of western education imparted in India, the bias was literary; and clerk-making rather than man-making seemed to be its objective. He knew how badly India needed a good system of education that would deal with the superstition and obscurantism that stalked the land, make for the application of science to industry and agriculture, leading to increase in production and removal of mass poverty, dispel the darkness induced by ignorance and mass illiteracy, develop a proper feeling of national pride and self-confidence, and give the people a correct picture of their religion that would make them feel that God was in man, and worship lay in the service of the masses. He was convinced that this would not happen under an alien system of education conceived and operated by India's foreign rulers. He proclaimed therefore: "We must have the whole education of our country, spiritual and secular, in our own hands, and it must be on national lines, and through national methods as far as practicable."

Vivekananda also laid great stress on the proper care of the body and the healthy development of one's physique. "Be strong, my young friends", he urged; "that is my advice to you. You will be nearer to heaven through football than through the *Gita*. These are bold words, but I have to say them to you. I know where the shoe pinches. You will understand the *Gita* better, with your biceps, your muscles a little stronger. You will understand the mighty genius and the mighty strength of Krishna better with a little of

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strong blood in you. You will understand the *Upanishads* better and the glory of the *Atman* when your body stands firm upon your feet and you feel yourselves as men."

Vivekananda was not satisfied with an education that merely looked to the development of the body and the mind of the student. He attached the greatest importance to the development of compassion and fellow-feeling for the common man. In fact, his *Vedantic* conviction led him to the role of education in making the pupil discover his identity with the rest of humanity and especially with those who were much worse off than himself in economic and social condition. "It is the heart", he said, "which takes one to the highest plane, which intellect can never reach. Always cultivate the heart." It is only now that we educationists in India are talking of introducing into our educational system the means for stimulating social awareness and developing a social conscience; and I am afraid we are still, by and large, in the stage of talking about it.

Vivekananda also laid great stress on the development of fearlessness in the young. He was firmly of the view that fear is the greatest enemy of self-development, and it is fear and helplessness that it breeds which has dominated the Indian masses because of centuries of oppression and neglect by the priests and kings who wielded power in the land. He was therefore an unashamed votary of strength and thundered: "Strength is goodness, weakness is sin. If there is one word that you find coming out like a bomb from the *Upanishads*, it is the word *abhaya* or fearlessness. Either in this world or in the world of religion, it is true that fear is the sure cause of degradation and sin. It is fear that brings misery, fear that brings death, fear that breeds evil." There can be no doubt that the fear he referred to as dominating the life of the people is a phenomenon that exists to this day, and it is this which is preventing the development of the individual and the growth of the nation. Education should therefore free the individual from the fear of the powers that

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be or of the unknown. This he would have done by the application of the *Vedanta* and the discovery by the individual of the divinity within him. Whether the youth of India accept the Vedantic approach for shedding fear, or the power of science of and technology over the environment for doing so, what is clear is that fear is the greatest deterrent to progress; and it should be the task of education through knowledge and the all-round development of human personality to get rid of this fear and enable the young to stand up and face the challenge of life and its many problems.

Vivekananda had the most modern ideas about the function of the teacher. The teacher should not think that he is making the child grow. "You cannot teach a child to grow", he said, "You can only help. A child teaches itself. You can take away obstacles, but knowledge comes out of its own nature." Drawing on the analogy of a growing plant, he went on, "Loosen the soil a little so that it may come out more easily. Put a hedge round it; see that it is not killed by anything, and there your work stops. You cannot do anything else. The rest is a manifestation from within its own nature. So with the education of a child, a child educates itself." The teacher can help, but the student has to draw on himself. "The external teacher offers only the suggestion which rouses the interna teacher to work to understand things." Vivekananda evidently felt that intellectual growth does not come through formal education. Growth comes only when the student exercises his mind and this involves a wholesale change in the methods of teaching usually employed in our schools and colleges.

Vivekananda also emphasised the importance of the teacher winning his pupil through personal interest and affection and building up his self-confidence. He felt himself able to do great things because of the confidence that his Master showed in his ability and integrity and the love that he showered upon him. His own life was a wonderful example of what an ideal teacher can do to a diffi-

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cult disciple. He saw that the current method of teaching followed in India destroyed the self-confidence of the majority of pupils and made them unfit to face the struggle in life that followed their schooling. He knew that self-confidence was more than half the secret of success in life and it required careful and sympathetic nurturing at an early age. Hence his emphasis on the need for educational methodology to cultivate the pupil's self-confidence rather than just load him with a lot of book-learning.

The great emphasis that Vivekananda laid in his teachings on education was the prime importance of taking it to the masses and particularly to the rural masses. He asserted that "the chief cause of India's ruin has been the monopolising of the whole education and intelligence of the land, by dint of pride and royal authority, among a handful of men." He saw that the distinction between the modern civilisation of western countries and the ancient civilisation of India lay in the spread of education from patricians to plebians in the former and said: "If we are to rise again, we shall have to do it in the same way, that is, by spreading education among the masses."

Vivekananda reverted to this theme several times during his lectures and letters. I have combined below a selection from what he said or wrote on the subject.

"Suppose you start schools all over India for the poor, still you cannot educate them, for the poverty in India is such that the poor boys would rather go to help their fathers in the fields or otherwise try to make a living than come to school. But if the mountain does not go to Mohammed, then Mohammed must go to the mountain. If the poor boy cannot come to education, education must go to him. Some of the self-sacrificing *sanyasins* who now go about from village to village preaching religion could be organised as teachers of secular things also. Suppose two of these men go to a village in the evening with a camera, a globe, some maps etc., they

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can teach a great deal of astronomy and geography to the ignorant. By telling stories about different nations, they can give the poor a hundred times more information through the ear than they can get in a life-time through books. But this requires an organisation."

Thus what we now talk about as audio-visual education and non-formal education was conceived of by Vivekananda more than 80 years ago; and it has taken us nearly a century and bitter experience of school drop-outs and growing illiteracy to discover this truth which was propounded in our own country by a distinguished non-accredited educationist like Vivekananda.

To sum up Vivekananda's ideas on education, its main base was his faith in the youth of the country for national regeneration. Hence his anxiety that they should get the right type of education and also go about the right way for getting the best out of education. Asked to define his idea of right education, he answered: "I never define anything. Still it may be described as a development of faculty, not an accumulation of words, but a training of individuals to will rightly and efficiently." He wanted man-making education for the young and he wanted such educated young men to use their education to make men out of others. And when he talked of men, he included women also.

Use of the intellect rather than accumulation of information, concentration rather than memorising, integrated development of the human personality in the ascending scale of body, mind and heart, cultivation of fearlessness in pursuit of truth and compassion and fraternity in dealing with fellow-men, science instead of superstition, rationality in place of obscurantism, and absorption of the spirited message of the *Vedanta* that all men are divine and it only needs will, strength and effort to realise their divinity, and in the process recognise the common bond that makes all humanity kin—this is the message that Vivekananda gives to those who give or seek education.

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Vivekananda was always crying against the Indian habit of neglecting essentials in favour of external ceremonials in the practice of their religion. Writing to a disciple, he used strong language: "Those whose heads have a tendency to be troubled day and night over such questions as to whether the bell should ring on the right or on the left, whether the sandal paste should be put on the head or anywhere else, whether the light should be waved twice or four times simply deserve the name of wretches. The universal aspect of God means this world, and worshipping it means serving it, not indulging in ceremonials. Now the Lord is having his toilet, now He is taking His meals, now He is busy on something else we know not what. And all this while the living God is dying for want of food, for want of education. If you want any good to come, just throw your ceremonials overboard and worship the living God, the Man-God—every being that bears a human form—God in his universal as well as individual aspect." Thus he sought to divert religion from its negative and sensuous aspect of ceremonial service of a personal God in idol form to the positive and rational aspect of serving the human being in want and in distress. The change that he strove for in individual worship is still to come about in India, even though well nigh a century has passed since he took up this battle.

While Vivekananda welcomed the impact of Western thought on India and particularly the stimulus it gave to look at ourselves anew and with a critical eye, he cautioned his countrymen against being dazzled by its materialist success and going in for a slavish imitation of its customs and way of life. He particularly criticised the increasing vogue among educated Indians to judge their own culture and way of life by the approval or disapproval shown by westerners and asserted that such mere echoing of others and base imitation and dependence on others was not the way for the nation to scale the pinnacle of civilisation and greatness. On the contrary, he wanted his countrymen to take pride in their fellow-countrymen and their

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native culture and not judge them harshly by alien standards, or seek to make them, including themselves, into pale imitations of western society, and asked, "Does the ass in the lion's skin become lion?" The country had more than enough strength in its *Vedanta* if only it could be disinterred from the irrelevant and anti-social accretions that the priestcraft had covered it with and then not only understood in its pristine purity but also used as a practical guide to everyday work and conduct. And he concluded his Bengali article on "Modern India" to the *Udbodhana* of March 1899 with these ringing words: "Forget not that the lower classes, the ignorant, the poor, the illiterate, the cobbler, the sweeper, are thy flesh and blood, thy brothers. Proudly proclaim 'I am an Indian, every Indian is my brother.' Say 'The soil of India is my highest heaven, the good of India is my good.'" And pray day and night to the Divine Mother 'Take away my weakness, take away my unmanliness and—Make me a Man'."

While he was impressed by socialist doctrines for the concern they showed for the poor and the exploited and their desire to set up a social order where men would be free from exploitation by their fellow-men, he was not in favour of the kind of sacrifice of individual freedom to social supremacy that he found in Hindu society. "In this country", he said, "men are born according to *Shastric* injunctions, they eat and drink by prescribed rules throughout life, they go through marriage and kindred functions in the same way and even die according to *Shastric* injunctions." Denouncing this harsh discipline as fraught with evil, he asked," If living by rule alone ensures excellence, if it be virtue to follow strictly the rules and customs handed down through generations, say then, who is more virtuous than a tree, who is a greater devotee, a holier saint than a railway train? Who has ever seen a piece of stone transgress a natural law? Who has ever known cattle to commit sin?" He pleaded for individual freedom, independent thinking and develop-

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ment of the individual will; and asserted, "It is more blessed, in my opinion, even to go wrong impelled by one's free will and intelligence than to be good as an automaton." "How can that be called society", he said, "which is formed by an aggregate of men who are like lumps of clay, like lifeless machines, like heaped-up pebbles? How can such society fare well? Were that possible, then instead of being slaves for hundreds of years we would have been the greatest nation on earth; and this soil of India, instead of being a mine of stupidity, would have been the eternal fountain-head of learning."

Vivekananda was evidently not a blind patriot nor was he an upholder of the *status-quo* in social relations or social institutions. He wanted fresh air to blow in and he wanted the individual to awake and assert himself. He knew that social change could not come about without the stimulus of individual thought; and that was why he advocated an educational system that would develop the thinking power rather than an accumulation of knowledge and would promote manliness and freedom from fear rather than conformity and superstition-induced behaviour.

Vivekananda was also aware that while intellectual development may stimulate change, change would not get implemented without organisation and character. He was acutely conscious of the deficiencies in his country's national character and its general spirit of inertia and passivity. It was his love for the country and the desire to see it change in the right direction that led him to undertake a fearless analysis of its national weaknesses of character and organisation.

The most frequent and unwholesome trait he found in the Indian people was jealousy. In a letter to an admirer that he wrote from Chicago in 1894, he said: "Jealousy is the central vice of every enslaved race. And it is jealousy and want of combination which cause and perpetuate slavery." In a letter to another friend during

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the same year, he wrote: "Why should the Hindu nation with all its wonderful intelligence and other things have gone into pieces? I would answer you: *jealousy*. Never were there people more wretchedly jealous of one another, more envious of one another's name and fame than this wretched Hindu race." In another letter written during the same year, he quoted Bhartrihari and wrote: "That is a national sin with us, speaking ill of others and burning at heart at the greatness of others. Mine alone is the greatness, none else should rise to it." In yet another letter written during the same year he said: "That jealousy, the absence of conjoint action, is the very nature of enslaved nations. But we must try to shake it off." Replying to the congratulatory address he received from the citizens of Madras on his success in the Parliament of Religions, he wrote: "Let us wipe off first that mark which nature always puts on the forehead of a slave—the stain of jealousy. Be jealous of none. Be ready to lend a hand to every worker of good. Send a good thought for every being in the three worlds."

What Vivekananda said about this national weakness is even more relevant today, even though we are no longer a slave nation but have enjoyed sovereign political status for several years. Evidently slavery was not the only cause, as Vivekananda thought, of this national vice. In fact, even in the ancient Vedic hymn invoking unity of mind, purpose and action among the Indians of those days, the concluding line was "Let us not be jealous of each other". It is high time therefore that we set about consciously identifying the motivation of jealousy in our thoughts, words and deeds and then try to overcome it by an equally conscious and deliberate act of will; otherwise the prospects of our realising the potential of development inherent in our national and intellectual resources will only prove to be a dream.

The other great defect that Vivekananda saw in our national character was our inability in organisation. After pointing out that

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the secret of success of westerners was their power of organisation and combination, he wrote to a friend: "The faculty of organisation is entirely absent in our nature, but this has to be infused." "The great secret", he added, "is absence of jealousy. Be always ready to concede to the opinions of your brethren and try always to conciliate. That is the whole secret." In a letter to a disciple in Madras written in 1895, he characterised the whole national character as one of childish dependence and stressed the necessity of an organisation that would teach the Hindus mutual help and appreciation. In the same letter, he added: "Work among those young men who can devote heart and soul to this one duty—the duty of raising the masses of India. Cultivate the virtue of obedience. No centralisation is possible unless there is obedience to superiors. No great work can be done without this centralisation of individual forces. Give up jealousy and conceit. Learn to work unitedly for others. This is the great need of our country."

Vivekananda gave a number of wise and practical suggestions for promoting the efficient working of the organisations which he wanted his countrymen to build. In a letter to a Gujarati friend in 1894, he wrote: "Three men cannot act in concert together in India for five minutes. Each one struggles for power and in the long run the whole organisation comes to grief." Writing to his Madras disciple at a later date during the same year, he asked him to organise a little society. "You will have to take charge of the whole movement" he said, but "not as a leader but as a servant. Do you know the least show of leading destroys everything by rousing jealousy."

To the same disciple he had written a little earlier "Do not try to lead your brethren, but serve them. The brutal mania for leading has sunk many a great ship in the waters of life." He wrote to him in another letter, "Do not fight with people, do not antagonise any one. Bear with the various opinions of everybody.

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Patience, perseverance and purity will prevail." To yet another admirer whom he was requesting to help a friend in bringing out a Bengali magazine, he wrote: "You must not throw cold water on anybody's project. Help as long as you find they are doing alright, and in cases where they seem to be going wrong, show them their mistake gently. It is criticising each other that is at the root of all mischief. That is the chief factor in breaking down organisation." Talking of leadership, he wrote in another letter, "It is a very difficult task to take on the role of a leader. One must be a *dasya-dasa*—a servant of servants, and must accommodate a thousand minds. There must not be a shade of jealousy or selfishness, then you are a leader." "The great difficulty is this: I see persons giving me almost the whole of their love. But I must not give any one the whole of mine in return, for that day the work would be ruined. It is absolutely necessary to the work that I should have the enthusiastic love of as many as possible, while I myself remain entirely impersonal. Otherwise jealousy and quarrels would break up everything. A leader must be impersonal." He warned his disciples not to be afraid of committing mistakes or brood over those which had already been made. He told them, "In this battlefield of ours, the dust of mistakes must be raised. Those who are so thin-skinned that they cannot bear the dust, let them get out of the ranks."

In a letter to his fellow monks, written in 1895, he put down on paper some rules for their guidance. These were: "1) Know partiality to be the chief cause of all evil. That is to say, if you show towards any one more love than towards somebody else, rest assured, you will be sowing the seeds of future troubles. 2) If anybody comes to you to speak ill of any of his brothers, refuse to listen to him *in toto*. It is a great sin to listen even. In that lies the germ of future troubles. 3) Moreover, bear with every one's short-comings. Forgive offences by the million. And if you love

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all unselfishly, all will by degrees come to love one another. As soon as they fully understand that the interests of one depend upon those of others, everyone of them will give up jealousy." He also cautioned them about the need for developing strict business principles. "One should keep the clearest account of everything in one's charge and never, never apply the fund intended for one thing to any other use whatsoever—even if one starves the next moment." Writing to Swami Brahmananda from Srinagar on August 1, 1898, he assured him that his writing to him about accounts did not indicate any lack of confidence in him. What he said on this and other aspects of what is needed in a good organisation is worth quoting in full: "I refer repeatedly to election, accounts and discussion so that everybody may be prepared to shoulder the work. If one man dies, another—why another only, ten if necessary—should be ready to take it up. Secondly, if a man's interest in a thing is not roused, he will not work whole-heartedly; all should be made to understand that everyone has a share in the work and property, and a voice in the management. This should be done while there is yet time. Give a responsible position to every one alternately, but keep a watchful eye so that you can control when necessary: thus only can men be trained for the work. Set up such a machine as will go on automatically, no matter who dies or lives. We Indians suffer from a great defect, viz., we cannot make a permanent organisation—and the reason is that we never like to share power with others and never think of what will come after we are gone." In another letter to Brahmananda written on July 17, 1898, he had said: "Skilful management lies in giving every man work after his own heart."

What he said applied not only to religious organisations but to all organisations, whether political or economic, social or cultural or any other. The thoughts that Vivekananda presented on organi-

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sational efficiency hold as good today as when they were first formulated in the nineties of the last century and implementing his ideas would certainly add to the efficiency of organisations,both official and voluntary, in the India of today.

Vivekananda was appalled at the almost universal state of inertia and inertness he found among his people in startling contrast to what he had found abroad. Talking to a disciple at the Belur *Math* in the beginning of 1899, he said: "Going round the whole world, I find that people of this country are immersed in great *Tamas* (inactivity), compared with people of other countries. On the outside, there is a simulation of the *Sattvika* (calm and balanced) state, but inside, downright inertness like that of stocks and stones—what work will be done in the world by such people? So my idea is first to make the people active by developing their *Rajas*, and thus make them fit for the struggle for existence. With no strength in the body, no enthusiasm at heart, and no originality in the brain, what will they do—these lumps of dead matter! By stimulating them I want to bring life into them—to this I have dedicated my life. I am born to proclaim to them that fearless message—'Arise, Awake!' Be you my helpers in this work. Go from village to village, from one portion of the country to another, and preach this message of fearlessness to all, from the *Brahmin* to the *Chandala*. Tell each and all that infinite power resides within them, that they are sharers of immortal bliss. Thus rouse up the *Rajas* within them—make them fit for the struggle for existence, and then speak to them about salvation. First make the people of the country stand on their legs by rousing their inner power, first let them learn to have good food and clothes and plenty of enjoyment—then tell them how to be free from this bondage of enjoyment. Throw aside your scriptures in the Ganges and teach the people first the means of procuring their food and clothing, and then you will find time to

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read to them the scriptures. If their material wants are not removed by the rousing of intense activity, none will listen to words of spirituality. Therefore I say, first rouse the inherent power of the *Atman* within you, then, rousing the faith of the general people in that power as much as you can, teach them first of all to make provision for food, and then teach them religion."

Vivekananda's attitude was in startling contrast to other men of religion who would seek to give religion to the poor while doing nothing about their poverty, thus making of religion an instrument for passivity and what an English observer later described as the "pathetic contentment of the Indian people". No wonder then that Marxists described religion as an opiate of the people and an aid for upholding the *status-quo*. But the religion that Vivekananda taught was of a different mettle. He wanted to activise the people and make them not only discontented with their poverty and backwardness but also stimulate in them both the desire and the will to help themselves.. He wanted material betterment first and was content to bring in religion later. That is why he called his religion *Practical Vedanta* and I call it Vedantic Socialism. No orthodox socilaist was a greater votary of the masses than the patriot-monk, Vivekananda; only his method of rousing them and ushering in a new social order was different from that of hatred, class war and materialist dominance favoured by other seekers for a better society.

In view of the current interest in re-structuring the goals and methodology of development, it may perhaps be useful to indicate briefly the views that Vivekananda held on development. Essentially, he was a believer in human development, material development only coming in as an adjunct to the development of man; and the goal of development was the perfection of man, the growth of the goodness inherent in him, and his realisation of his manifestation as a part of the Universal Reality with its divine personality.

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His stress therefore was on the individual rather than on society and on individual action rather than on institutional. He was of course not thinking of the individual in isolation as some of the Indian seers of old had done. On the contrary, he was always talking of the individual in society and in relation to society, but nevertheless to him the individual was both the goal and the instrument for development. Thus, in an interview to the *Sunday Times*, London, in 1896, he said "The basis of all systems, social or political, rests upon the goodness of man. No nation is great or good because Parliament enacts this or that, but because its men are great and good;" He declared himself against the constant human tendency to multiply wants and described it as morbid. "We have become so unhinged and unnatural that nothing natural will satisfy us. We must have unnatural excitement, unnatural food, drink, surroundings and life." He was certainly not for the development of an affluent society as was happening in the west even during his time. At the same time, he did not want either starvation or illiteracy or social and material backwardness for any section of the people and certainly not for its masses. He was however no believer in an utopia--an objective heaven or millenium. He was sure that objective society is always a mixture of good and evil. In a letter that he wrote on November 1, 1896, from London, he asserted: "The progress of the world means more enjoyment and more misery too. To have good and no evil is childish nonsense. Two ways are left open—one by giving up all hope to take up the world as it is and bear the pangs and pains in the hope of crumbs of happiness now and then. The other, to give up the search for pleasure and seek for the truth present in themselves." But Vivekananda was not unaware of the practical implications of the second alternative, which would have been his normal preference.Thus,in a classroom talk delivered in Madras in 1892-1893, he admitted : "Too early religious advancement by the Hindus and that superfineness in everything which

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made them cling to higher alternatives, have reduced them to what they are. The Hindus have to learn a little bit of materialism from the west and teach them a little bit of spirituality." Vivekananda therefore preached a third way. He was of the definite opinion that development should include both materiality and spirituality. Replying to a question on the meaning of civilization, he told his disciples at Cossipore in 1897: "The more advanced a society or nation is in spirituality, the more is that society or nation civilized. No nation can be said to have become civilized only because it has succeeded in increasing the comforts of material life by bringing into use lots of machinery and things of that sort. The present day civilization of the west is multiplying day by day only the wants and distresses of man. On the other hand, the ancient Indian civilization, by showing people the way to spiritual advancement doubtless succeeded, if not in removing once for all, at least in lessening in a great measure, the material needs of man. In the present age, it is to bring into coalition both these civilisations that Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna was born. In this age, as on the one hand people have to be intensely practical, so on the other hand they have to acquire deep spiritual knowledge."

He was however not in favour of a wholesale reform or an imposed solution from without. He believed not in reforms but in growth, not in revolution but in evolution and declared in the speech he made at Madras on "My Plan of Campaign": "I do not dare to put myself in the position of God and dictate to our society, 'This way thou shouldst move and not that'. Feed the national life with the fuel it wants, but the growth is its own: none can dictate its growth to it." Vivekananda had this unique belief in the ability of the people to help themselves, once they were freed from their shackles and realised their inner potential. In this, he was unlike the many revolutionaries who, though inspired by a similar deep concern for the masses, yet showed their lack of faith in mass ability

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to raise themselves with their own potential by trying to give them a well-ordered blueprint devised by themselves and in the drawing up of which the masses had no participant share.

It is interesting to note that while Vivekananda's concern for the poor and their betterment rested on his religion, he also drew support for it from his reading of different stages in Indian history and his prognosis for the future. In fact he universalised his reading of Indian history to cover the whole world.

In a letter to a friend he writes :

"Human society is in turn governed by the four castes—the priests, the soldiers, the traders and the labourers. Each state has its glories as well as its defects.

"When the priest (the *Brahmin*) rules, there is a tremendous exclusiveness on hereditary grounds—none but they have the knowledge and none but they have the right to impart that knowledge. Its glory is that at this period is laid the foundation of the sciences. The priests cultivate the mind, for through the mind they govern.

"The military (*Kshatriya*) rule is tyrannical and cruel, but they are not exclusive and during that period arts and social culture attain their height.

"The commercial (*Vaishya*) rule comes next. It is awful in its silent crushing and blood-sucking power. Its advantage is, as the trader himself goes everywhere, he is a good disseminator of ideas collected during the two previous states. They are still less exclusive than the military, but culture begins to decay.

"Last will come the labourer (*Shudra*) rule. Its advantage will be the distribution of physical comforts, its disadvantages (perhaps) the lowering of culture. There will be a great distribution of education, but extraordinary genuises will be less and less.

"The first three have had their day. Now is the time for the last—they must have it—none can resist it. I am a socialist not because I think it is a perfect system, but half a loaf is better than no

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bread. The other systems have been tried and found wanting. Let this one be tried. A redistribution of pain and pleasure is better than always the same persons having pains and pleasures."

One can see a parallel in this thesis with that of Marx—feudalism, capitalism and then socialism, and the inevitability of proletarian rule succeeding capitalist domination.

The analogy with Marxian thinking is seen even more clearly in the following passage taken from Vivekananda's contribution in Bengali to the *Udbodhana* of March 1899.

"Whether the leadership of society be in the hands of those who monopolise learning, or wield the power of riches or arms, the source of its power is always the subject masses. By so much as the class in power serves itself from this source, by so much is it sure to become weak. But such is the strange irony of fate, such is the queer working of *Maya*, that they from whom this power is directly or indirectly drawn, by fair means or foul—by deceit, stratagem, force, or by voluntary gift—they soon cease to be taken into account by the leading class. When in course of time, the priestly power totally estranged itself from the subject masses, the real dynamo of its power, it was overthrown by the th n kingly power taking its stand on the strength of the subject people; again, the kingly power, judging itself to be perfectly independent, created a gaping chasm between itself and the subject people, only to be itself destroyed, or become a mere puppet in the hands of the *Vaishyas* who, now succeeded in securing a relatively greater co-operation of the mass of the people. The *Vaishyas* have now gained their end; so they no longer deign to count on help from the subject people, and are trying their best to dissociate themselves from them; consequently, here is being sown the seed of the destruction of this power as well.

Though themselves the reservoir of all powers, the subject masses, creating an eternal distance between one another, have

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been deprived of all their legitimate rights; and they will remain so as long as this sort of relation continues.

"Yet a time will come when there will be the rising of the *Shudra* class, with their *Shudra-hood*; that is to say, not like that as at present, when the *Shudras* are becoming great by acquiring the characteristic qualities of the *Vaishya* or the *Kshatriya*; but a time will come, when the *Shudras* of every country with their inborn *Shudra* nature and habits—not becoming in essence *Vaishya* or *Kshatriya*, but remaining as *Shudras*—will gain absolute supremacy in every society. The first glow of the dawn of this new power has already begun to break slowly upon the western world; and the thoughtful are at their wits' end to reflect upon the final issue of this fresh phenomenon. Socialism, Anarchism Nihilism and other like sects, are the vanguard of the social revolution that is to follow."

Vivekananda did not really work out all the details of what I have called his Vedantic Socialism. Nor did he draw up any outline of the transition he envisaged towards a socialist society in his country or the institutional changes that this implied or the strategy of either parliamentary or revolutionary action needed to bring about the change. His merit was that, nearly a century ago, he was concerning himself with changes about which we started talking much later and continue to talk today. Thus he campaigned for the abolition of poverty and we are doing the same today with the dominance of *garibi hatao* in Indian political discussions. It was he who pleaded for the removal of mass illiteracy and today it has be become a part of the programme of the Government. Then again it was he who spoke up for the uplift of the backward classes and ending of upper class (caste) tyranny, and today his plea has become the current slogan of all political parties in India, whether in power, or not in power. There can be no doubt therefore Vivekananda was far ahead of his times in his concern for social change, socialist change, and a new

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and rejuvenated Indian society. But he cannot be listed in the gallery of orthodox socialists, whether of the democratic or revolutionary political persuasion. His title to socialism, or what I have called Vedantic Socialism, rests on the climate of change he wanted to bring about in Indian life, conduct and character and the rousing of spirituality among his people through the new and practical interpretation he gave to the Hindu concept of the *Vedanta*.

While Vivekananda wanted social changes, he also knew that this could not come merely by forming societies and assemblies or by the mere spread of socialistic doctrines of the exploitative character of current society and the need for ending this exploitation by changing the social order. Nor could western science and development lead by itself to human development. The engine of social change must have its proper fuel; and this, according to Vivekananda, could only come from spirituality and the *Vedanta* which proclaimed the innate divinity in man and the sameness it gave all men as the basis for the social ethic of non-exploitation and universal human welfare. It was therefore that he said in his Madras lecture on "My Plan of Campaign": "Before flooding India with socialist or political ideas, first deluge the land with spiritual ideas. And after preaching spiritual knowledge, along with it will come that secular knowledge and every other knowledge that you want." And the spiritual knowledge that he wanted to broadcast to his people was the message of the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads* and the relevant *Puranas*, the *Vedanta* with its assertion of the universal presence of divinity in all individuals, and the doctrine of universal love and service of man as worship of God. Thus he was more concerned with providing the intellectual and emotional fuel for social and economic change than in providing a blue-print for a new society or an outline of the institutional and other measures needed for reaching it. Once the fuel had done its work, he would leave it to the people themselves to work out the details of the methods and

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machinery needed for the reconstruction of society. He chose his reinterpretation of *Vedanta* to be the means for providing this fuel. Whether he was right or not in choosing religion as the path for change, there can be no doubt, that without right values and strong character, no amount of institutional change or legislative reform or proletarian dictatorship can bring about the new society that socialists and communists dream of. Our experience of the last 50 years of people's capitalism, democratic socialism and the transitional socialism of the communist regimes of the Soviet Union, China and Eastern Europe have all shown that behind any attempt either to create or sustain a durable better society, we need the necessary spirit and emotional strength which will act as the fuel for its motor. Has not Vivekananda tried to give just that spirit and is that not enough to justify its being described as *Vedantic* Socialism?

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Section III

Vivekananda—the Man

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XII

Vivekananda–the Man

So far we have been dealing with the life and the teachings of Swami Vivekananda. But no biography can be complete without an assessment of the personality and traits of its subject. And, truly, Vivekananda as a man, with normal human feelings and failings, and yet possessed of a gigantic will to overcome them in the cause of the mission to which he had given himself, is a far more exciting measure of his greatness than the kind of miracles and perfection with which traditions surround all great men of religion.

In appearance, during the days he was a college student and also getting to be a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda was a young man with a frame slightly above middle height and somewhat thickset in the shoulders. He had an expansive chest. His head was broad toward the front, a traditional indication of high mental power. His most striking features were his eyes, which were rather prominent, and varied greatly in their colour according to the feelings of the moment. Sometimes they were luminous in the depth and steadfastness of gaze; and at other times they would sparkle with pleasure and excitement. When he spoke it was as if, for the time being, only the person spoken to existed. He was muscular and athletic in build and of striking carriage. He

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had a strong jaw in line with his strong will and firm determination. But his smile was both merry and benign.

His appearance varied according to what struck his visitors most as his trait. To some he seemed a joyous companion, to some an intense thinker, and to some others as one lost in a world of his own rich with the ideal of love and beauty. At all times, however he had an aristocratic mien, and impressed every one as a leader among men. When he grew serious, his face would strike awe in the hearts of his companions. When he became excited in discussion, his eyes and face would blaze, displaying the tremendous force of his personality. When he was absorbed in his own thoughts, he could send such a force of repelling reserve that none would dare to disturb him. He had an imperious personality which was not only powerful but also radiant and withal gracious and of gentleness.

This was how Dr Annie Besant described her first impression of meeting him at the Parliament of Religions in 1893.

"A striking figure, clad in yellow and orange, shining like the sun of India in the midst of the heavy atmosphere of Chicago, a lion head, piercing eyes, mobile lips, movements swift and abrupt—such was my first impression of Swami Vivekananda, as I met him in one of the rooms set apart for the use of the delegates to the Parliament of Religions. His figure was instinct with pride of country and pride of race. Purposeful, virile, strong, he stood out, a man among men, able to hold his own."

Giving her first impression of Vivekananda when he lectured at Detroit on February 14, 1894, Mrs Mary C. Funke, a well-known leader of society, writes: "The large edifice (the Unitarian Church where he gave his lecture) was literally packed and the Swami received an ovation. I can see him yet as he stepped on the platform, a regal, majestic figure, vital, forceful, dominant, and at the first sound of that wonderful voice, a voice all music,—now like the

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plaintive minor strain of an Eolian harp, deep, vibrant, resonant—there was a hush, a stillness that could almost be felt, and the vast audience breathed as one man. And he spoke as one with authority."

The famous American poet, Ella Wheeler Wilcox, has this to say in the *New York American* of May 26, 1907 of her meeting Vivekananda 12 years earlier in New York: "We went out of curiosity (the Man whose name I bear and I) and before we had been ten minutes in the audience, we felt ourselves lifted up in an atmosphere so rarefied, so vital, so wonderful, that we sat spell-bound and almost breathless to the end of the lecture. When it was over we went out with new courage, new hope, new strength, new faith, to meet life's daily vicissitudes." She added that her husband found in the lecture the religion and the philosophy he had been seeking, and that they both went to hear him for months afterwards during that "terrible winter of financial distress, bank failures and stock exchange crashes." She then continued: "Sometimes after sleepless nights of worry and anxiety, the Man would go with me to hear the lecture and then he would come out into the winter gloom and walk down the street smiling and say 'It is all right. There is nothing to worry over'. And I would go back to my own duties and pleasures with the same uplifted sense of soul and enlarged vision. When any philosophy, any religion, can do this for human beings in this age of stress and strain and when, added to that, it intensifies their faith in God and increases their sympathies for their kind and gives them a confident joy in the thought of other lives to come, it is a good and great religion."

Speaking of the wonderful time they had in the Thousand Islands Park Island in the St. Laurence river in the summer of 1895, Miss S. E. Waldo, one of Vivekananda's ardent students, writes :

"From morning till night, we lived in a constant atmosphere of intense spirituality. Often playful and fun-loving, full of merry,

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jest and quick repartee, he was never for a moment far from the dominating note of his life. Everything could furnish, a text or an illustration, and in a moment we would find ourselves swept from amusing tales of Hindu mythology to the deepest philosophy. We were delighted to listen, for he never failed to point out the reality hidden under myth and story and to draw from it valuable spiritual lessons."

An intimate disciple recorded the following impression of his influence in California through his lectures and classes :

"As a lecturer he was unique; never referring to notes, as most lecturers do; and though he repeated many lectures on request, they were never mere repetitions. He seemed to be giving something of himself, to be speaking from a super-experience. Quick, and when necessary, sharp at repartee, he met all opposition with the utmost good nature and even enjoyment. To popularise abstractions, to place them within the mental grasp of every very ordinary intellects was his achievements."

It may be appropriate to conclude this recital with the following description of Vivekananda given in the *Phrenological Journal of New York.*

"Swami Vivekananda is five feet eight and half inches in height and weighs one hundred and seventy pounds. His head measures twenty-one and three fourths inches in circumference from ear to ear across the top. He is thus very well-proportioned as regards both body and brain. As he is opposed to war and teaches a religion of unmixed gentleness, we should expect his head to be narrow in the region of the ears at the feet of combativeness and destructiveness and such is the case. The same deficiency is much marked in the diameters a little further up at secretiveness and acquisitiveness. Firmness and conscientiousness are fully developed. Benevolence is quite conspicuous. Music is well indicated in the width of the temples. The prominent eyes betoken superior memory of words

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and explain much of the eloquence he has displayed in his lectures. The upper forehead is well-developed at casuality and in comparison to which is added a fine endowment of suavity and sense of human nature. Summing up the organization, it will be seen that kindness, sympathy and philosophical intelligence, with ambition to achieve success in the direction of higher educational work, are his predominant characteristics."

Whether this "scientific" assessment of Vivekananda's personality was wholly based on the science of phrenology or had gained by some actual knowledge of the person and his doings, there can be no doubt that it fitted in with the experience of those who had met or heard Vivekananda, and also with the contemporary account given of his personality by Dr Brijendra Nath Seal which has been quoted earlier in the work. As is pointed out by his eastern and western disciples in their classical biography of Vivekananda: "It was his immense personal magnetism, his directness, his lucidity, and his vision which gave convincing power to his utterances and which bound indissolubly to himself, here, there, and everywhere, large groups of the very finest and the most devout disciples. The remarkable way in which he classified religious ideas, the great breadth of his intellectual and spiritual culture, the great ethical import attached to all he said, and, finally, his strength, manliness and fearlessness of spirit, each and all of these were bound to create an indelible impression."

Though his whole life was spent in an unparalleled flow of intense activity, an embodiment of the *rajasic* quality which he was always urging his inactive countrymen to emulate, Vivekananda was basically a scholar who loved to study and meditate, was shy of publicity, disliked name and fame, and wanted to spend his time quietly and alone in lofty mountains or thick-grown forests or by river-banks, or with beauteous nature. But as we have seen his destiny lay elsewhere and he had to bring a strong will to assist

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his destiny.

"I am not an organiser", he wrote to a friend in 1894, "my nature tends towards scholarship and meditation". Indeed, on the very night of his triumph at the Parliament of Religions, he had wept like a child at the thought that this had brought to an end his quiet life as an unknown monk, denied him the obscurity he desired, and set him on the path to name, fame and incessant activity, all of which he disliked. Writing to Miss Mary Hale in 1894 about his vexation at getting loads of newspapers from India retailing his triumph at the Parliament of Religions, he said: "I have had 'boom' enough in India. The old peace is gone for ever and no rest anywhere from heretofore. These newspapers will be my death, I am sure. They will now talk what I ate on such and such a date and how I sneezed. I really was caught in the trap and now no more a reserved life." Early next year, he bursts out in one of his letters: "I long, Oh, I long for my rags, my shaven head, my sleep under the trees, and my food from begging." And to another disciple he wrote that he was working out the great *Karma* that had fallen upon him and hoped that the Lord would soon liberate him from the task of preaching.

Though he had now become world famous as a preacher, his heart was not in lecturing. Writing to the Hale sisters on March 15, 1894, he expressed himself thus: "I am wearied of lecturing and all that nonsense, I will tell you what is to my taste, I cannot write and I cannot speak, but I can think deeply, and when I am heated, can speak fire. It should be however to a select, a very select few. Let them, if they will, carry and scatter my ideas broadcast—not I. This is only a just division of labour."

"My natural tendency", he wrote to a friend in 1896, "is to go into a cave and be quiet, but a fate behind me pushes me forward and I go. Whoever could resist fate?" This was of course his natural impulsive reaction. He knew however that it was not

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fate but his own conscious and deliberate decision that had pushed him into this kind of life. Did he not tell Sharat, long before he went to Chicago's Parliament of Religions and become famous all over the world, when he was still an itinerant monk: "My son, I have a great mission to fulfil and I am in despair at the smallness of my capacity. I have an injunction from my *Guru* to carry out this mission. This is nothing less than the regeneration of my motherland. Spirituality has fallen to a low ebb and starvation stalks the land. India must become dynamic and effect the conquest of the world through her spirituality." The conflict he went through between his natural inclination and the call of his mission had begun to affect him even during this period. As his biographers have put it: "In the spiritual evolution of Naren, two parallel lines of thought are seen at work at this period of his life. In the conscious phase he was filled with the desire to realise the highest truth and remain immersed in *Samadhi*. All other ideals appeared insignificant to him in comparison. But in the unconscious plane of his mind another current of thought seemed to work with equal force. At such periods he was literally mad for the regeneration of his motherland. He would forego the pleasure of the *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* even in order to work for the regeneration of his motherland. It was the mission and purpose of his life. His was not to be a life of asceticism and retirement but that of intense activity and self-immolation. He would be sternly reminded of this latter ideal, as if by an unseen power, when he concentrated all his energy on meditation."

In later years, the circle was reversed. His conscious self got immersed in activity but his unconscious self clamoured for a life of meditation. In fact it was this continuous conflict that made him burn his candle at both ends and ultimately led to his leaving this mortal world at the early age of forty. After he became famous and immersed in activity, and being at the same time troubled

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by his desire for quiet and meditation he wrote to his friends that it was all the work of Kali.

His Master had transferred to him all the fruits of his *sadhana* and the Divine Mother was impelling him to take to incessant activity for fulfilling the mission that Sri Ramakrishna had entrusted him with. Whatever be the explanation, fate or Kali, there is no doubt that all the activity, lecturing, organising, training, name, fame and publicity which were his lot after going to America went against his natural inclination and, in fact, constituted his biggest sacrifice for the fulfilment of his Master's mission.

Vivekananda was however very much interested in the variety he found in nature, and in men and in the monuments they had left in history. The many letters that he wrote as also the lectures and talks he gave are replete with his interest in what may be called the mundane or secular aspect of life. Whether he was wandering about in his own country or was travelling abroad, he was always eager to visit museums, picture galleries, and historical monuments, and would keep his companions spellbound with his exciting accounts of the great things that had happened in the past almost as if he were an eye-witness of history. He liked human beings and he loved to laugh. He told an audience in London to whom he was lecturing on *Jnana* and *Karma* that "The first step is the joy of living. Asceticism is fiendish. To laugh is better than to pray. Sing, get rid of misery. Don't for Heaven's sake infect others with it." And he carried out this directive in all the lectures, class room talks, and conversations with which he carried on his preaching. He loved to tell amusing stories and would be quick to retain and retail similar stories he heard from others. Unlike the traditional man of religion, he had an amazing sense of humour, and had no hesitation in making fun of himself. In a letter from London addressed to Mary Hale on September 17, 1896, he wrote: "Today I reached London, after two months of climbing and walking and glacier-

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seeing in Switzerland. One good it has done me—a few pounds of unnecessary adipose tissue have returned back to the gaseous state. Well there is no safety even in that, for the solid body of this birth has taken a fancy to outstrip the mind towards infinite expansion. If it goes on in this way I would have soon to lose all personal identity even in the flesh—at least to all the rest of the world." Sometimes he used his irrepressible humour to relieve the tenseness of embarrassing situations. At the end of a lecture which culminated in an impassioned outburst on the glory of God-consciousness, there came an interruption: "Swami, have you seen God?" Quick came the reply, his face lighting up with a happy smile: "What do I look like—a big fat man like me." The audience dissolved in laughter. In a letter to Marie Holboister written on July 25, 1897 he refers to his turning grey and adds: "It is bad for a preacher to be young, don't you think so? I do, as I did all my life. People have more confidence in an old man and it looks more venerable. Yet the old rogues are the worst rogues in the world, isn't?"

He relished hearing humorous stories. Two stories which used to send him into fits of laughter were of a new Christian missionary visiting a cannibal tribe and a "dusky" clergyman preaching on "creation". The first related to a Christian missionary newly arrived in a far-off island inhabited by cannibals. He proceeded to the chief of the place and asked him "Well, how did you like my predecessor?" The reply was, "He was simply de-li-cious". The other story was about the "dusky" preacher who was shouting, "You see, God was making Adam, and he was making him out of mud. And when he had a got im made he stucks im up again a fence to dry". And then—"Hold on there preacher", suddenly cried out a learned listener. "What abouts dat ere fence? Whos a made dat fence?" The preacher replied sharply, "Now youse listen here Sam Jones. Don't youse be a gwining to ask such ere questions. Youse'll smash up all theology". Nothing interested him more in

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times of mental and physical weariness than to "talk nonsense" and be amused. He would take up a copy of *Punch* and laugh till the tears rolled down his eyes. At other times he would spend the morning or evening reading comic papers and magazines from cover to cover. His friends knew the strain of his teachings and preaching, and gladly adjusted themselves to his merry moods. They in fact relished the way in which he enjoyed himself as a child.

He was most relaxed in his letters to young westerners whom he had known from their early girlhood. One such favourite was Mary Hale, the daughter of George Hale, whose wife had come to his rescue at Chicago and with whose family he maintained a life-long friendship. He would call Mr Hale "Father Pope" and Mrs Hale "Mother Church", and when he talked about their son Sam, he would bring up the tale of Sam Weller and ask him to "beware of widders". The daughters—there were three—he would call "Babies,, ; and Mary was his favourite. He wrote to her from New York on June 22, 1895; "I am glad all the babies are doing well but sorry there was no 'catch' even this winter; and every winter the chances are dwindling down. Here near my lodgings is the Waldorf Hotel the rendezvous of lots of titled but penniless Europeans on show for a 'yankee' heiress to buy. You may have any selection here, the stock is so full and varied. There is the man who talks no English; there are others who lisp a few words which no one can understand; and others are there who talk nice English but their chance is not so great as that of the dumb ones– the girls do not think them enough foreign who talk plain English fluently."

These lines came immediately after his account in the same letter of the book he was planning to write on *Vedanta* philosophy and of how this world was a mixture of good and evil, of happiness and misery. So amazing was Vivekananda's natural ability to pass swiftly from the serious to the light and *vice versa*. He was really an astonishingly inconsistent but thoroughly human person, to

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whom the world was at once a place of solemn seriousness and of lighthearted laughter.

He wrote to her on September 17, 1896: "You, Mary, are like a nettlesome Arab—grand, splendid. You will make a splendid queen—physically, mentally. You will shine alongside of a dashing bold, adventurous, heroic husband; but, my dear sister, you will take the life out of our easy-going, practical, plodding husbands of the everyday world. Therefore my advice to you is that until you bring down your ideals to a more practical level, you ought not to marry. If you do, the result will be misery for both of you. In a few months you will lose all regard for a commonplace good nice young man and then life will become insipid. As to sister Isabella, she has the same temperament as you; only this kindergarten has taught her a good lesson of patience and forbearance. Perhaps she will make a good wife." But Mary was not to be put off by such warnings. She was young and was interested in marriage. He would tease her about her marriage plans and wrote to her on December 27, 1899: "You could not get the millionaire! Why don't you start for half or one-fourth million? Something is better than nothing. We want money; he may go into Lake Michigan, we have not the least objection." He would tease her married sister Harriet and ask her to part with some of the money her husband made on the ground that by his dark and queer presence in the family drawing room he scared away other suitors, clearing the field for her Woolley. "Tell Mr Woolley", he wrote to Mary Hale, "he got the sister but has not paid the brother yet. Moreover it was the fat black queerly dressed apparition smoking in the parlour that frightened many a temptation away, and that was one of the causes which secured Harriet to Mr Woolley. Therefore, I want to be paid for my great share in the work. Plead strong, will you? if he is Woolley, I am greasy Bengali as the English call us here—Look! where is my money?"

The letter he wrote to Mary on her father's death was a classic

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in the literature of condolence letters and is worth quoting:

"Your letter bearing the sad news of Mr Hale's passing away reached me yesterday. I am sorry, because in spite of monastic training, the heart lives on; and then Mr Hale was one of the best souls I met in life. I have lost many, suffered much, and the most curious cause of suffering when somebody goes off is the feeling that I was not good enough to that person. When my father died it was a pang for months and I had been so disobedient.

"Just now I am afraid life begins for you Mary, in earnest. We may read books, hear lectures and talk miles, but experience is the one teacher, the one eye-opener. We learn through smiles and through tears we learn. We don't know why, but we see it is so; and that is enough.

"Well, well, what shall I say to you Mary? You know all the talks; only I say this, and it is true—if it were possible to exchange grief, and had I a cheerful mind, I would exchange mine for your grief ever and always. Mother knows best."

Unlike many traditional men of religion, Vivekananda was a strong opponent of the prevalent cult of astrology. He ascribed the resort to astrology as essentially a result of human weakness and lack of self-confidence whereas a man shows his strength by deciding to make his own fate. "We may be under planetary influences" he said, "but it should not matter much to us. Let stars come, what harm is there? If a star disturbs my life, it would not be worth a cent. You will find that astrology and all these mystical things are generally signs of a weak mind; therefore as soon as they are becoming prominent in our minds we should see a physician, take good food and rest." It was not that he dismissed as unreal all these irrational phenomena of reading a man's past life and predicting his future. In fact, he told a disciple that on the eve of his leaving for America he was greatly disturbed by a dream that his mother had died and felt unwilling to leave before getting news of his mother

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for which he had sent a telegram to Calcutta. On the fervid persuasion of his friend Manmatha and spurred by his own anxiety to get rid of the mental suspense, he went to a man who could read the past and the future of a man's life with the help of a spirit over whom he had acquired mystic powers. And he told Swami Yogananda that everything the man had foretold came to be fulfilled to the letter. When Yogananda told him that it was because he would not believe all this that this experience was necessary for him, Vivekananda retorted that he was not a fool to believe everything without direct proof. He added that all this is *Maya*, one of the many magic mysteries he had come across alongside this bigger magic conjuration of the universe. Saying this, he turned affectionately to his disciple and said: "Don't allow all that worthless nonsense to occupy your mind. Always discriminate between the real and the unreal and devote yourself heart and soul to the attempt to realise the *Atman*. Vivekananda mentioned another experience of his concerning a villager who was said to have been possessed by a spirit when he was travelling in the Himalayas. A red hot axe was being applied to parts of his body and his hair, but nothing was found to be burnt and there was no pain on his face. On being asked by the villagers to exorcise the spirit, Vivekananda had to do something. He moved near the man, and touching the axe to find out if it was really heated, burnt his fingers though the axe had by this time been cooled down to blackness. Smarting with the burn, he placed his head on the man and repeated the *Japas* for a short while. To his surprise the man came down to normal within 10 or 15 minutes; the spirit evidently had been successfully exorcised. And the whole gathering showered their reverence on him and called him a wonderful man. Vivekananda added: "I could not make head or tail of the whole business. What with the smarting burn in the hand and the impenetrable puzzle of the whole affair, I could not have any

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sleep that night. Thinking of the burning axe failing to harm living human flesh, it occurred again and again to my mind 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

During the course of the lectures he delivered on *Bhakti Yoga*, Vivekananda referred to the miracles and healing that Jesus Christ was credited with and said it was not these that constituted his strength. He continued: "Any fool can do these things, fools can heal others and devils can heal others. I have seen demonical men do wonderful miracles. They seem to manufacture fruits out of the earth. I have known fools and demonical men tell the past, present and future. These are powers truly but demonical powers. The other is the spiritual power of Christ, which will live and always has lived, an almost gigantic love and the words of truth that he preached. So in worshipping Christ, in praying to him, we must always remember what we are seeking. Not those foolish things of miraculous display, but the wonderful powers of the spirit, which makes man free, gives him control over the whole of nature, takes from him the badge of slavery, and shows God unto him." What makes for spirituality is not miracles or super-natural powers but the doctrine of love for all men and the attempt to practise it in one's life which was what made Christ the greatest exponent of *Bhakti Yoga* and the service of man.

While Vivekananda was frank in confessing his inability to explain all this magic and mystery, he held fast and firm to his belief that all this was *Maya* and only weakened a man's will either to shape his own destiny or find the God within him. He did not challenge the possibility of acquiring mysterious powers of mind-reading or healing or foretelling the future by certain *yogic* or *tantric* practices and *sadhanas*. In fact, his Master had such powers and even he had some similar power. But it was wrong to use such powers, for they came not only in the way of the person's spiritual

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development but also eventually led to his spiritual ruin. He told his disciples: "Sri Ramakrishna used to disparage these supernatural powers; his teaching was that one cannot attain to the Supreme Truth if the mind is diverted to the manifestation of these powers. The human mind, however, is so weak that, not to speak of householders, even 90 per cent of the *sadhus* happen to be votaries of these powers. In the west, people are lost in wonderment if they come across such miracles. It is only because Sri Ramakrishna has mercifully made us understand the evil of these powers as being hindrances to real spirituality that we are able to take them at their proper value." Unfortunately, Vivekananda's wisdom has not yet permeated the country. Astrology and miracles have become even more of a vogue in the India of today—and that too with many so-called intellectuals—than it was during the much earlier days when Vivekananda cautioned the people against running after them.

Vivekananda, as was to be expected, was a very independent person who hated to be managed, insisted on speaking the truth as he saw it even if it came in the way of getting support for his mission, and was not prepared to play a hypocritical role even if it meant what was considered tactlessness on his part. He had a quick temper and would react violently to any insult to his country or its culture or to his own person. He could be won neither by flattery nor bribery; nor could he be bullied. The only way to get round him was love and affection; and his disciples, genuine friends, and admirers gave it to him in abundant measure.

In a letter to a friend written on February 1, 1895, he referred to an altercation he had with a Presbyterian gentleman who got angry and abusive and he was reprimanded by one of his American friends for the tactlessness which would come in the way of the success of his work. He writes: "So, it seems, is your opinion. I know full well how good it is for one's wordly prospects to be

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sweet. I do everything to be *sweet*, but when it comes to a horrible compromise with the truth within, then I stop. The accommodating man finds a path of roses, the non-accommodating one of thorns. But the worshippers of *vox populi* go to annihilation in a moment—the children of truth live for ever."

He continued: "I am so sorry, sister, that I cannot make myself sweet and accommodating to every black falsehood. The Lord is great. He will not allow me to become a hypocrite. I have not found a way that will please all, and I cannot be but be what I am, true to my own self. I am too old now to change into milk and honey. Allow me to remain as I am. I have a message to give, I have no time to be sweet to the world, and every attempt at sweetness makes me a hypocrite. I will die a thousand deaths rather than lead a jelly-fish existence and yield to every requirement of this foolish world—no matter whether it be my own country or a foreign country." And he concluded his letter with love and blessings for the well-intentioned but mistaken friend who thought that hypocrisy masquerading as tact could promote his mission.

While he had great reverence for Christ and his teachings and treated him as an *avatar* who preached universal love and non-injury, he had no patience with the hypocrisy that lay behind what the west called its Christian civilisation. And he gave strong expression to his feelings in one of the lectures he delivered at Detroit in the February of 1894 to which reference has been made earlier in this volume. Naturally these utterances roused bitter opposition from Christian fanatics who attacked him in turn, not his philosophy but his personal record and way of life as unbefitting a man of God. When his many friends, both liberal clergymen and distinuguished laymen, asked him to reply in kind to his critics, his only answer was "Why should I attack in return? It is not the monk's place to defend himself. Besides Truth will have its way, believe me, Truth shall stand." He was of course greatly disturbed by these attacks

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on his character and letters written to his friends at that time were filled with bitter indignation against the slanderers; but he would not reply to them in public. He relied on truth and he was proved right, for his friends, including many clergymen, gave the lie to the slanders circulated about him; and soon these stories vanished from circulation as darkness does before dawn. And his prestige rose higher and the power of his ideas grew in influence over the American public.

He also reacted violently to the criticisms appearing in the Indian press about his taking non-Hindu diet and to the advice from his friends that he should not violate the canons of orthodox Hindu diet. He wrote to A* on September 9, 1895: "If the people in India want me to keep strictly to my Hindu diet, please tell them to send me a cook and money enough to keep him. I have worked hard and sent all the money I got to Calcutta and Madras and then, after doing all that, stand their silly direction! They cannot raise a few rupees to help the work of the greatest man their country ever produced—Ramakrishna Paramahamsa; and they talk nonsense and want to dictate to the man for whom they did nothing and who did everything! Such is the ungrateful world", and added "Do you mean to say I am born to live and die as one of these caste-ridden, superstitious, merciless, hypocritical, atheistic cowards that you find only among the educated Hindus? I hate cowardice, I will have nothing to do with cowards or political nonsense. I do not believe in any politics. God and truth are the only politics in the world, everything else is trash." These forceful words only indicate the importance he attached to values and how they should dominate every walk of life, whether social reform or religious orthodoxy or political agitation; and values also included a deliberate attempt to practise them in one's personal life.

*A was a disciple in Madras

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A characteristic example of his warm personality—his temper and its cooling, his pride and his humility—is given by his reaction to an attack made on his caste in Madras by some social reformers who resented his talking with such authority on the Hindu *Shastras*, giving them an interpretation that did not fit in with their wholesale attack on Hindu religion. He told a Madras audience: "If my caste is left out, what will there be of the present day civilization of India? In Bengal alone, my blood has furnished them with their greatest philosopher, the greatest poet, the greatest historian, the greatest archaeologist, the greatest religious preachers; my blood has furnished India with the greatest of her modern scientists. These detractors ought to have known a little of our own history." Having made this arrogant declaration, he swept aside his anger and continued: "This is only by the way. But I am not at all hurt if they call me a *Shudra*. It will be a little reparation for the tyranny of my ancestors over the poor. If I am a *pariah* (the Tamil name for Untouchable), I will be all the more glad, for I am the disciple of a man who—the *Brahmin* of *Brahmins*—wanted to cleanse the house of a *pariah*. Of course the *pariah* would not allow him; how could he let this *Brahmin sanyasin* come and cleanse his house. And this man woke up in the dead of night, entered surreptiously the house of this *pariah*, cleansed his latrine, and with his long hair wiped the place, and that he did day after day in order that he might make himself the servant of all. I bear the feet of that man on my head; he is my hero; that hero's life I will try to imitate. By being a servant of all, a Hindu seeks to uplift himself. That is how the Hindu should uplift the masses and not by looking for any foreign influence." Citing this as an instance of what *genuine* orthodox Hinduism can do at home, he added: "Let any one of our reformers bring out that life, ready to serve even a *pariah*, and then I will sit at his feet and not before that. One ounce of practice is worth 20,000 tons of big talk." His words could well be a commentary

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on the India of today, when the Constitution has abolished untouchability, intellectuals and politicians wax with eloquent indignation on the treatment that untouchable still get, and yet would do nothing personal by way of serving the so-called untouchables and establishing his identity with the rest of the Hindu community.

Though by nature a scholar, a mystic and one who wanted to spend his time in quiet meditation, Vivekananda was very meticulous about details when it came to organising. This is revealed in the detailed instructions he sent to Swami Abedhananda about his passage, outfit, pocket-money, etc., when he was arranging for his journey to England in October 1895; similarly in the detailed instruction he sent to Swami Ramakrishnananda from Darjeeling on April 20, 1897 about how he should conduct the Ramakrishna Mission in Madras. In a letter written to a fellow monk who had recently been ill, he tells him to avoid late dinners, and unwholesome food, use a bamboo filter for filtering cooking and drinking water, and warns him that water is the cause of all sorts of diseases. "It is not the clearness or the dirtiness of water but its being full of disease germs that causes diseases. Let the water be boiled and filtered." He was very particular about financial management, accountability to the donor's instructions about the use of his donations. Thus he send detailed instructions to Swami Brahmananda in a letter he wrote on October 12, 1897 from Murree.

"1. To all those who collect money and send it to the *Math*, the acknowledgement of the amount will be issued from the *Math*.
2. The acknowledgement must be in duplicate, one for the sender and one for filing in the *Math*.
3. There must be a big register in which all the names and addresses of the donors will be entered.
4. Accounts, accurate to the last pie, must be kept of the amounts that are donated to the *Math* fund, and fully accurate

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accounts should be obtained from Sarada and others to whom money is given. These accounts should afterwards be published."

In another letter, written on December 8 of the same year, he cautions Swami Brahmananda: "Be very careful about money matters; keep detailed accounts, and regarding money, know for certain that one cannot rely even on one's own father."

Many other instances could be given from his letters and conversations about how he would go into detail on any matter connected with his mission or his disciples or even his friends. This was one of the ways in which he came down into the mundane world for the mission he had taken up, sacrificing his own natural inclination to avoid the world and lead a life of quiet meditation. And he also did it with efficiency.

While he was a bond slave of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa and lived only to carry out his Master's mission, he was at the same time against making him into a God and satisfying oneself with his worship, while ignoring his ideas. He was himself convinced that Sri Ramakrishna was an *avatar*, an incarnation—in fact to him the highest among the incarnation—but he was also fully aware of the fatal Indian habit of personal worship taking the place of the work and teachings of the person being worshipped, while it entailed no obligation either to preach or practise his ideas. That was why he wrote to a fellow monk in 1894, after welcoming the news that Sri Ramakrishna's festival had come off with great eclat, "I do not take into consideration whether people accept his name or not, but I am ready to lay down my life to help his teachings, his life and his message spread all over the world. What I am most afraid of is the worship room. It is not bad in itself, but there is a tendency in some to make that all in all and set up that old-fashioned nonsense once again—that is what makes me nervous. I know why they busy themselves with those old effete ceremonials. Their spirit craves

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for work, but having no outlet they waste their energy in ringing bells and all that!" He wrote to another fellow monk in 1896 warning him to keep off from attempts to stuff down everybody's throat that Ramakrishna Paramahamsa was God and said: "At the same time if people worship him as God, no harm. Neither encourage nor discourage. The masses will always have the person, the higher ones the principle. We want both. But principles are universal, *not* persons. Therefore stick to the principle he taught, let people think whatever they like of his person." To Vivekananda who loved Sri Ramakrishna with more than the love of a mother for her child or a lover for his beloved, the Master's message was more important than his divinity; and it was to the spreading of that message that he devoted himself and wanted the institution he founded in his name also to devote itself. That was why he cautioned Swami Ramakrishnanada, whom he had sent to Madras for guiding the *Math* there, about not making the worship of Sri Ramakrishna very elaborate and long, and use the time thus saved in holding classes and doing some preaching. He also told Swami Akhandananda in a letter he wrote to him on July10,1897:"Curtail the expenses of worship to a rupee or two per mensem. The children of the Lord are dying of starvation. Worship with water and *tulsi* leaves and let the allowance for the *Bhoga* (food offerings) be spent in offering food to the living God who dwells in the persons of the poor—then will His grace descend upon everything." To Vivekananda worship of God meant service of man and if Ramakrishna was God the same also applied to his worship. .

Vivekananda attached more importance to character than to religiosity or other external manifestations of religious discipline. Writing to Miss Noble on June 7, 1896, he asserted that the world is in the chains of superstition, that misery was caused by ignorance and what was needed was light. He went on: "The earth's bravest and best will have to sacrifice themselves for the good of many,

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for the welfare of all. Buddhas by the hundreds are necessary with eternal love and pity. Religions of the world have become lifeless mockeries. What the world wants is character. The world is in need of those whose life is one of burning love, selfless." n a letter written to a fellow monk two years earlier, he had said: "Neither money pays nor name nor fame nor learning; it is character that can cleave through adamantine difficulties. Bear this in mind." Writing in 1896 about his idea of how the *Math* should be run, and its doctrines, he expressed indifference about whether anyone accepted *Paramahamsa Deva* as an *avatar* or not. What was much more important was how he lived and what he taught. He said: "In point of character, *Paramahamsa Deva* beats all previous records and, as regards teaching, he was more liberal, more original and more progressive than all his predecessors. The older teachers were rather one-sided while the teaching of this new incarnation or teacher is that the best point of yoga, devotion, knowledge and work, must be combined now so as to form a new society." Vivekananda's character was an illustration of what his Master had preached, and he literally sacrificed his health and his life spreading his Master's message.

Vivekananda was a highly emotional being. Whatever he undertook had behind it not only his intellectual reasoning and his spiritual insight but also the entire force of his emotional strength. As Swami Vimalananda pointed out, "Whatever he would think or feel he would do so with wonderful vehemence and intensity. And this whole-souledness was another marked feature of Swamiji's life." He quoted Vivekananda telling one of his disciples who complained of his inability to manage the servants of the *Math* and make them do their respective duties, "Don't think your heart is full of love, because you cannot give them a little scolding now and then. Can you give your life for them?" He told the disciple that namby-pamby was not love, quoted the poet who described as ideal

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a combination of the hardness of the thunderbolt and the softness of the flower, and affirmed that "love is not weak sentimentality". Vivekananda was himself a monument of love with the hardness of the thunderbolt in the execution of his mission. But he did not relish the hardness he had to use sometimes in the cause of his work. "Poor boys, how hard I am on them at times", he wrote to Mrs Ole Bull, but added, "Well, they know in spite of all that I am their best friend." In another letter to Miss Macleod, he talked with pride of the good work his boys were doing, adding, "Well, scolding has both sides, you see; it makes them up and doing." In an earlier letter to Swami Brahmananda dated October 11, 1897, he showed symptoms of the visible strain this scolding and hardness were having on his essentially soft nature. He wrote: "I have now come to the conclusion that I am unfit for further work. I now understand that I have been very harsh to all of you. But I knew, however, that you would bear with all my shortcomings. I have been increasingly harsh to you. Whatever has happened is now past—it is all the result of past *Karma*. What is the good of my repentance? I do not believe in it. It is all *Karma*. Whatever of Mother's work was to be accomplished through me, She made me do, and has now flung me aside breaking down my body and mind. Now I retire from all this work. Forgive me if you will, or do what you like. But I have all along been like a hero—I want my work to be quick as lightning and firm as adamant. I am a man of action. Simply advice upon advice is being given—this one says this, that one says that; again that man threatens, and this one frightens! This life is not, in my view, such a sweet thing that I would long to live through so much care and caution and fear. So loss of money or of anything else, I cannot bother about and will not. When I fight, I fight with girded loins. I am the child of the Divine Mother, the source of all power and strength. To me cringing, fawning, whining, degrading inertia and hell are all one and the same thing.

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O Mother of the Universe, O my Gurudeva, who would constantly say 'This is a hero'—I pray that I may not have to die a coward.

"I am in a tremendous hurry. I want to work at hurricane speed, and I want fearless hearts.

"I have rebuked Sarada severely. What to do? I do scold; but I also have much to complain.

"I bless you all with a full heart. May Mother enshrine her self in your hearts as strength. May She make you all fearless. This I have seen in my life—he who is overcautious about himself falls into dangers at every step; he who is afraid of losing honour and respect gets only disgrace; he who is afraid of loss always loses. May all good attend you all."

Strength and fearlessness were the keynote of Vivekananda's approach to life's problems; and he got terribly impatient when he thought his own chosen companions failed to come upto his standards. In fact it was not easy for him to convert his *gurubhais* to his way of thinking and his interpretation of his Master's teaching as Practical *Vedanta*—meditation, of course, and search for realisation, but leading to preaching, work, and service of man. That he succeeded in changing the centuries-old traditions governing the life-style of Indian *sanyasins* was largely due to the authority that Sri Ramakrishna had given him in his own lifetime over his fellow-disciples; but it was equally due to the great love that they bore for their Naren and their recognition of the stupendous work he had done both abroad and at home in spreading the name of their Master and preaching his gospel. All this of course, meant a terrific mental and emotional strain for Vivekananda; for his own natural inclination was akin to that of his fellow-disciples, to shun the crowd, meditate and seek God in *Samadhi* for which bliss he had often himself importuned his Master. But he had to overcome his natural inclination, and cajole, bully, and win by love his fellow-disciples to the path of the worship of the *Daridra-narayan* which was the

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mission bequeathed to him by his Master. No wonder that he got completely exhausted by his mission even before he had reached his midthirties, and did not live to see his fortieth birthday.

This dichotomy between his inner longing and his actual living is seen expressed time after time in the many letters he wrote between 1895 and 1902 to his friends and disciples, both Indian and foreign. His intense longing for rest from his mission and return to the quiet of obscurity and the peace of meditation makes tragic reading, and outlines most graphically the enormous sacrifice he made in the cause of spreading his Master's message and trying to fulfil the mission that had been entrusted to him.

Thus, in the heyday of his triumph in America, he writes to a Madras disciple in September 1894: "This nonsense of public life and newspaper blazoning has disgusted me. I long to go back to the Himalayan quiet." He writes to another disciple in 1895: "I have no time even to die, as the Bengalees say, I work, work, work and earn my bread and help my country, and this all alone, and then get only criticism from friends and foes for all that. I am really tired from incessant work. I want to go to India for a long rest." He wrote to an American friend in August 1899: "This toy world would not be here, this play could not go on, if we were knowing players. Some of us here take the part of the rogue of the play, some heroic—never mind, it is all play. This is the only consolation. The world cannot touch our souls. If you want, even if the body be torn and bleeding, you may enjoy the greatest peace in your mind. And the way to attain that is hopelessness. Not the imbecile attitude of despair, but the contempt of the conqueror for things he has attained, for things he struggled for and then throws aside as beneath his worth." "Hopelessness" was rather a peculiar word to use, but what he was referring to was what Sri Krishna had preached in the *Gita*: "Infinite peace follows the surrender of one's achievements."

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In September of the same year, he writes to an English friend: "As for me, I am always in the midst of ebbs and flows. I knew it always and preached always that every bit of pleasure will bring its quota of pain, if not with compound interest. I have a good deal of love given to me by the world; I deserve a good deal of hatred therefore. I am sure that the fault is mine, and mine only, for every wave of dislike and hatred that I get. It could not be otherwise.".

The year 1900 saw in him intensification of his dislike for activity and made him long for rest. On January 17, 1900, he writes to Mrs Ole Bull: "I want rest, a meal, a few books, and I want to do some scholarly work." He writes to her again on March 7: "Anyway this stress is terrible, thinking of what may come next, wishing what ought to come next. I am unequal to the responsibility; I am found wanting; I must give up this work." A few days later, on March 22, he writes to Miss Mary Hale: "I do not want to work any more. My nature is the retirement of a scholar. I never get it. I pray I will get it now that I am all broken and worked out. I am really sick of this platform work and eternal trudging and seeing new faces and lecturing." Vivekananda now has a premonition of his approaching end and writes to an American friend on April 7: "My boat is nearing the calm harbour from which it is never more to be driven out. I have no wish, no ambition now, I am the servant of Ramakrishna. I am merely a machine. I know nothing else. Nor do I want to know." Five days later, he writes to another American friend: "I am happy, at peace with myself, and more of the *sanyasin* that I was ever before. And work? What is work? Whose work? Whom shall I work for? I am free. I am Mother's child. She works, She plays. Why should I plan? What should I plan? Things came and went, just as She liked without my planning. We are her automata. She is the wire-puller." On April 18, he writes to Miss Josephine Macleod in a mood of unflat-

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tering introspection, "Behind my work was ambition, behind my love was personality, behind my guidance was thirst for power Now they are vanishing and I drift. I come, Mother, a spectator, no more an actor." On August 25, he writes to N (an English disciple) from Paris, on his way back to India: "Now I am free, as I have kept no power or authority or position for me in the work. I also have resigned the Presidentship of the Ramakrishna Mission. I am so glad a whole load is off me, now I am happy. I no longer represent anybody nor am I responsible to anybody." Almost the last of the letters he wrote that year before returning to India was to Sister Christine and dated October 14: "I am sending all the money I earned in America to India. Now I am free, the begging monk as before. I have had many difficulties. But all my difficulties and suffering count for nothing as I have succeeded. I have attained my aim. I have found the pearl for which I dived into the ocean of life. I have been rewarded. I am pleased."

The last years of his life was marked by a return of Vivekananda to his original nature. He would spend most of his time in the *Math* or its grounds and indulge in meditation. His heart was now given full play; and his overwhelming love for the poor and the distressed got displayed in full measure. He felt the sufferings of others as his own, as has been indicated earlier by his relation with the Santhal labourers working on the *math* grounds. He would tell the *sanyasins* and *bramacharins* of the *math* repeatedly to open out their hearts, give up desire for personal salvation, and go from village to village devoting their lives to the service of the poor. He told them: "After so much *tapasya* I have understood this as the highest truth. God is present in every being. There is no other God besides that. He who serves all beings serves God indeed." The *Jnani* was getting integrated with the *Bhakta*, and work was giving place to meditation and universal love. At the same time, he did not give up his mission of teaching and spreading his Master's message. Only he

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now spent his time, not in public lectures or spectacular orations, but in the training of his disciples, and conversations with those who came to seek the succour of his wisdom and understanding. He drew up detailed rules for the daily routine of the monastic order, and emphasised the need for rigorous discipline. Study, discussion, meditation, worship and service of man—all formed a part of the way of life he set out for them. As days passed, however, he withdrew more and more even from this task of running the affairs of the *math* saying: "How often does a man ruin his disciples by remaining always with them. When men are trained it is essential that their leader leave them for without his absence they cannot develop themselves." His Master and the Divine Mother constantly occupied his mind, and intense meditation became almost his sole occupation. His restless soul was now at peace, for he was preparing for his final realisation and the eternal merging of his identity with the Universal Reality. The box in which his Master had locked his earlier realisation of *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* was now open. His work was finished and his earthly end was now at hand. And Vivekananda departed from this world, freed from the tyranny which his work had imposed on him, and ending his quest for God whom he had sought from his early years. He had seen God and now he was to be at one with Him.

What then shall we say of Vivekananda the man? Only this, he was a man who was conquered by the love his Master gave him and in turn conquered himself by the strength of the love he bore for his Master to carry out the mission which he had entrusted to him. A man among men and yet greater than most is what one can say about Vivekananda the man. But because he was a man after all, the strain of his self-conquest ruined his health, shortened his years and brought about his end in the very prime of his life. Truly, it was himself and his life that the man Vivekananda gave in sacrifice to build Vivekananda the monk and found the Practical *Vedanta*

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which was his prescription for the ailing world. In my view this sacrifice was greater than even the greatness of the truth for which he made the sacrifice.

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Section IV

Vivekananda, a Builder of Modern India

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XIII

A Builder of Modern India

HAS VIVEKANANDA helped to build modern India? If so, how, and to what extent ? These are not easy questions to answer. One has first to be clear about what one means by modern India and then about what is meant by building modern India. We have also to take account of the fact that modern India is still being built. Can we claim modernity for the India of today? If one were to go into all those questions in depth, it would mean writing another book.

One thing is clear. Vivekananda though known as the patriot-monk, did not take part in politics. He did not make political speeches attacking British rule, nor did he raise the banner of political revolt to secure independence for his country. We must not forget however that Indian politics in the nineteenth century was by and large supplicatory rather than demanding. It was largely the concern of the English educated middle class who wanted to share in the administration and get better personal treatment rather than a movement that was designed to draw in the masses and unfurl the flag of independence. Bal Gangadhar Tilak was still to raise his battle-cry of "Swaraj is my birthright", Gandhiji with his mass bias and mass appeal had yet to appear on the Indian scene, and the Congress had still to change its political goal to *Poorna Swaraj* or complete independence. One can hardly imagine Vivekananda,

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with his fierce pride in the country and his own sturdy independence, taking part in the Indian politics of his time. But there can be no doubt that he played a great role in preparing the ground for the politics of independence and giving the country a new political ideology through his re-interpretation of *Vedanta* and the Hindu religion and his concern for the masses and their problems. The triumph of his spiritual mission to the west, his success in placing *Vedanta* on the world map and winning the respect of Americans and Englishmen when his country was still a British colony, all acted as a tonic on his countrymen and helped to restore their self-respect and revived their confidence in India's national destiny. The fiery patriotism that was so closely intertwined with his religious preaching of Practical *Vedanta* undoubtedly stimulated patriotic fervour among the youth of India, especially in Bengal and in the south, and he became a symbol of national pride as one who had successfully stood up to the west and made it acknowledge him as Master. In fact, Vivekananda was politically far ahead of his time in the importance he attached to the masses, the indignation he displayed on their exploitation, the pride he showed in India's ancient culture and religion without becoming either revivalist or obscurantist, and his desire for the country to get the benefit of western science and technology for national development without falling into the trap of slavish imitation of western ways of life, and the importance he attached to the uplift of women and the backward classes. In my view, the ideas that he propounded, which were politically revolutionary for the India of his times, had a tremendous influence on subsequent political thinking and action in India and embraced within its sphere the mass-dynamism of Gandhi and the socialistic ideas of Nehru. Though not in politics, he did exert a visible influence on the political developments in his country and the modern India that has emerged from this development.

To begin with, the new conception of patriotism that Viveka-

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nanda placed before the country with such moving eloquence had a catalytic role in shaping the ideological content of the movement for India's independence. To Vivekananda, India did not just mean either a geographical entity or a haven of opportunity for the elite. He took pride in the country's inheritance from the past; at the same time, he was not an obscurantist revivalist with undiscriminating admiration for all that had come down from the past. He held the view that customs and life styles had a very definite link with the times and circumstances under which they came into existence and had to be changed with the passing of time and the changing of circumstances. He also held the view that the purity of India's ancient philosophic and religious truths had been divested of their basic values and made to support an exploitative social, economic and power system, and that the system had to be changed to bring it in line with the original values of the *Vedanta* with its ethic of basic human identity and service of all human beings, who were handicapped, whether economically or socially or culturally, by those who were better-off, whether by inheritance or by natural ability. To him the country meant the people and the people meant the masses. Removal of poverty, removal of illiteracy, restoration of human dignity, freedom from fear, availability of secular and spiritual knowledge to all irrespective of the caste in which they were born or the class to which they belonged, and the ending of all monopolies, whether religious or economic or intellectual, or social or cultural or political—all these formed a part of what he derived from his Practical *Vedanta* or what I have termed his *Vedantic* Socialism. The India of the future that he talked about in the last years of the 19th century is very much the same as what young India is talking about in the current years of the 20th century. Vivekananda's influence on modern India can be seen in its development of socialist ideas, its new emphasis on mass uplift, and mass participation, and its growing identification of mass welfare with genuine patriotism.

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He was however not a revolutionary in the sense of one who wanted to destroy the past and build an entirely new future. He believed in building on the foundations of the past, but shorn of its shortcomings and its irrelevant and anti-social accretions, and restored to its original purity of *Vedanta* and its identification of all human beings with the universal reality. He did not believe in a social reform that left out economic exploitation or an economic reform that left out social disparities or a political reform that left out the freedom of the individual and concentrated all power in government or in legislation. He was essentially a believer in the power of the spirit that alone can give the fuel for the successful operation of institutions or legislation, and the strength and purity of individual character that alone can give life and efficiency to the building up of a new society. I have the feeling that he would not fit in with any of the political parties that strut on the Indian stage today. But that would not be to his discredit as we know what a mess they have made of the modern India that they have had so much to do with. As Vivekananda used to say "One ounce of practice is worth 20,000 tons of big talk". What the country needs is more of practice and less of professions, more of his Practical *Vedanta* and less of its abstract philosophy, and more of religion and less of religiosity. I have no doubt in my mind that, whether consciously or not, Mahatma Gandhi's life, teachings and activities bear the impress of Vivekananda's life and teachings. And I am afraid that they both have shared the same fate of inspiring but not getting implemented the ideas they stood for.

Apart from the socialistic slant and emphasis on the masses that Vivekananda gave to modern India, he can also be legitimately credited with giving the country the secularist ideal that now forms a part of the Constitution of modern India and is accepted by all political parties that operate on the Indian scene. It was he who first proclaimed on world platforms that all religions were but dif-

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ferent paths that led to the same goal, and traced to the ignorance of this basic truth the violence and bloodshed running through history because of the sectarianism, bigotry and fanaticism that priestcraft and secular exploiters had fastened on individual religions. He did not believe in the superiority of one religion over another nor in the supersession of all existing religions by one universal religion. He was not interested in founding a new sect based on *Vedanta* either. To him all religions were true and were entitled to exist with mutual respect; only he wanted each religion to respect the right of the other not only to existence but also esteem as one among the many paths that led to the same goal. His idea of secularism was in fact in advance of what is found in modern India. He wanted not just mutual tolerance but also mutual respect and, above all, mutual recognition of the basic truth that underlies all individual religions and makes them kin. And he wanted this recognition not only from government and social institutions, but also from the people at large and in the individual behaviour of all Indian citizens. Though his secular ideal is still to be attained in modern India, he can at least be given the credit for the acceptance by modern India of the right of all religions to co-existence and the avoidance of discrimination by the state and other public institutions among the followers of different faiths. And the secular ideal he proclaimed was not based on a religious humanism or intellectual or materialist reasoning, but on the ideals of Hinduism. It was as a Hindu that he called upon all Indians to respect all non-Hindu faiths as a part of the Hindu ethic that he professed.

In the particular Indian context of the traditional animosity that had existed between Hinduism and Islam, his teachings have a special relevance for modern India. Like Gandhi who came after him and proclaimed Hindu-Muslim unity as basic to Indian integrity and development, Vivekananda also had the same firm belief in Hindus and Muslims working together for the development of the Indian

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nation. Thus he wrote to a Mohammedan gentleman of Nainital on June 10, 1898—after pointing out that while the *Vedanta* inherited by the Hindus taught one to look upon all religions and sects with love, this was still to be developed in practice by the Hindus—"On the other hand our experience is that if ever the followers of any religion approached to this equality in an appreciable degree in the plane of practical work-a-day life, it is those of Islam and Islam alone. Mankind ought to be taught that religions are but varied expressions of the religion which is oneness, so that each may choose the path that suits him best. For our own motherlands, a junction of the two great systems, Hinduism and Islam—*Vedanta* brain and Islamic body—is the only hope." Vivekananda revered the Prophet Mohammad as an Incarnation; he had many Mohammedan friends, stayed in Mohammedan houses, and had the unique experience of a Muslim gentleman of Allahabad proclaiming Vivekananda himself as an incarnation and styling himself as 'Mohamedananda'. When one of his followers wanted to open an orphanage, he encouraged him but added "you must admit Mohammedan boys too but never tamper with their religion". Vivekananda wanted Hindu-Muslm unity based not only on the religion of Hindu *Vedanta* and Islamic democracy, he also wanted it to be built upon his basis of common interests. Talking to a disciple in Balaram Babu's residence in Calcutta in 1898, he said: "Men can never be united unless there is a bond of common interest, you can never unite people merely by getting up meetings, societies and lectures, if their interests be not one and the same. Guru Govind made it understood everywhere that the men of his age, be they Hindus or Musalmans, were living under a regime of profound injustice and oppression. He did not create any common interest, he only pointed it out to the masses. And so both Hindus and Muslims followed him." Thus Vivekananda's conception of Hindu-Muslim unity transcended the base of spirituality to include that of identity of material interests, but both

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had to be used if the result was to be effective. It is perhaps the neglect of this integrated approach that has made the communal problem continue to plague the political and social fabric of modern India.

Socialism and secularism were not the only fields in which Vivekananda helped to build the climate, if not the totality of practice, in modern India. His understanding of *Vedanta* and the Hindu religion made him a total opponent of the practice of untouchability. He found neither religion nor secular logic behind this terrible institution and went all out to denounce it, anticipating by many decades, the more effective campaign that Gandhi and Ambedkar carried on against this system and the later incorporation of its abolition in the Constitution and the acceptance by all political parties of the right of untouchables to not only equal treatment with all other Indian citizens but also to special treatment so as to bring them up to the national level. That untouchability or at any rate discriminatory treatment of the so-called untouchables still continues in many parts of modern India goes to prove the basic Vivekananda-thesis, namely, that it is not legislation or governmental action alone that can bring about effective reform but also organisation based on common interests and a base of spirituality that would furnish the needed fuel to the motor of both the legislation and the organisation.

Vivekananda's other sphere of influence on modern India should have been his ideas on education. From the beginning of his mission, he was stressing the importance of universal literacy as an essential condition for mass uplift and development. He recognised the difficulty of poor children in rural areas in attending primary schools even if they were available and in their vicinity, as they would be required to help their parents in their work and enable them to earn their miserable livelihoods. He therefore talked of the need for taking education to where the children could conveniently gather and at the same time which would not cut into their

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work. What we now call informal education he had conceived of so many decades back. And if informal education does become a part of our rural educational system, then Vivekananda's association with it could well be given the same place as is given to Gopal Krishna Gokhale in the matter of primary education. Similarly in regard to the programmes for universal adult literacy which suffered an ill-fated demise during 1971-1977 and is now being sought to be resuscitated by the government, the credit for pioneering the idea should go to Vivekananda. In fact the idea he conceived of itinerant teachers of secular knowledge—he of course devised it principally for the *sanyasins* whom he wanted to take to the path of service in addition to that of meditation—which is a most practical way of both rousing interest in adult illiterates and giving rural adults some rudiments of modern knowledge still remain to be taken up by Governments, let alone implemented on any significant scale. Vivekananda can also be given credit for pioneering the idea of industrial training and technical education which have now become a part of the educational system of modern India. His particular stress on making educational facilities available for India's many villages is also worth remembering in the context of the emphasis being placed on the subject after India achieved her independence. Most important of all however is the contribution that Vivekananda made to the concept of modern education for integrated human development. As has been indicated earlier, he wanted man-making education. He definitely rejected the concept of education as an information-oriented and memory-filling process. He believed that education should aim at developing the mind rather than stuff it with book knowledge and that it would be easier for a stimulated mind to acquire knowledge on its own and digest it properly. He wanted education to include all aspects of life, not only the intellectual, but also the physical, cultural, social and

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spiritual and lead to the building of character and the adoption of a fearless and self-reliant attitude towards life. Like Acharya Vinoba Bhave who came after him, he believed that education should result in the ability of the pupil to teach himself rather than merely depend on the teacher. His ideas on education were more modern than those of the professional educationists who moulded the education of modern India; and it is only now that our educational experts are beginning to talk the language he used so many decades ago.

Vivekananda also influenced the course of life in modern India by the emphasis he placed on the stimulation of *rajasic* qualities in the Indian people and getting them to set about the task of betterment of their material conditions of life rather than get lost in a soporific religion that produced contentment with their existing life of poverty and degradation. Though he was a man of religion and personally preferred quiet and meditation, he saw clearly that the peace which came from satiation with activity was qualitatively quite different from that which came from helplessness and despair and constituted no more than the peace of the grave. He was therefore all for activity that would lead to increase in production and the removal of poverty. There is however a significant difference between his plea for material development and the materialist ideology that now dominates modern India. To Vivekananda material development was only a transitional stage towards spiritual development, and not a substitute for it. He wanted material development for the benefit of the masses, but his primary objective was their spiritual development, which was being hampered by the illiteracy and superstitions associated with their poverty. Moreover, when he talked of material development, he was not thinking in terms of creating an affluent society. On the contrary, like Gandhi who came after him, he was in favour of a limitation of wants and rejected the thesis of unlimited wants favoured by the economists. If he wanted material development, he did so specially for the masses,

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who were in a state of poverty and had no chance to meet even their essential human needs. His plea for the restoration of *rajasic* activity among the Indian people was therefore qualitatively different from the development in modern India, which seems only to stress *rajasic* activity and material development without leaving effects of the spirituality that was such an essential feature of Vivekananda's teachings.

Vivekananda's teachings have also influenced the position of women in India. While he undoubtedly laid great stress on the traditional values of chastity and family life for women, he was totally against their subjection and discrimination vis-a-vis men. He drew attention repeatedly to the prominent place occupied by women in the intellectual field in ancient India and blamed the priestcraft for relegating them to a backward position by denying them equal rights with men in education and in knowledge of the scriptures and their propagation. He was wholly against child marriage and expressed his admiration for the patriotic fervour and fearlessness of the Rani of Jhansi. He established a *math* for women *sanyasins* breaking traditional Hindu taboos on their inclusion in monkdom and passionately pleaded for the extension of educational facilities both secular and spiritual to all women. He was not in favour of reformist men dictating to women even in regard to how they should function after they had attained liberation from their centuries-old subjection. He told the people that women should be given education and then left to decide their future for themselves instead of being told what their place should be by men, however liberal they might be in their outlook towards women. "Educate your women first and leave them to themselves", he would say, "then they will tell you what reforms are necessary for them. In matters concerning them, who are you?" He wrote to his Madras disciple: "Can you better the condition of your women? Then there will be hope for your well being. Otherwise you will remain as backward as you are now." Vive-

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kananda believed that "the best thermometer" to the progress of a nation is its treatment of its women and affirmed that the Hindu religion does not at all prevent women being educated and that the old books had shown that the universities were equally resorted to by both girls and boys and India had an unique record of women saints and expositors in its religious history. He expressed his confidence that women will work out their own destinies once they get education and it was not for men to shape the destiny of women. Only he wanted women's education to include spirituality and religion in the sense in which he used it so that they could play an effective role in building the modern India of his conception. Today of course, every one is for women's education and giving them their rightful place; but in actual fact, women's education in rural India is still at a low level, while as regards the inclusion of spirituality in their education, it is still to be accomplished. So here again, while Vivekananda has influenced the making of modern India, what has been achieved is still far below what he preached.

The most visible contribution in institutional form that Vivekananda has made to modern India, however, is in the establishment of the Ramakrishna Mission and the altogether new direction he gave to the role of *sanyasins* and monks in Indian society. For the first time in Indian history, we have monks professing the Hindu faith who do not isolate themselves from society and live only for their own personal salvation. The monks of the Ramakrishna Mission not only live in society but also actively concern themselves with its service and betterment. They impart not only spiritual knowledge to all without distinction of caste or creed, but also set up educational institutions for the imparting of secular education. They have set up hospitals, dispensaries, orphanages and other institutions for alleviating human suffering. They are also in the forefront in the work of relief and rehabilitation when the country suffers natural disasters such as drought, floods, cyclones and epidemics. The reli-

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gion they preach is not sectarian and they give equal respect to all faiths and different ways for reaching the same spiritual goal. The Ramakrishna Mission is also continuing the work that Vivekananda started of spreading the knowledge of *Vedanta* abroad and functions not only as an Indian but also as a world institution. In fact, the Ramakrishna Mission has added lustre to the image of India and given many of her people a new outlook on religion in tune with Vivekananda's ideas on Practical *Vedanta*. The Mission is his greatest concrete and institutional contribution to the building of modern India. As a matter of fact, his influence in giving India's traditional religions a new orientation of secularism, social service, and missionary activities abroad is not confined to what the Ramakrishna Mission is doing. Monks and heads of many other religious institutions in the Hindu-fold are now following the path he pioneered and taking to the spread of secular education and medical relief, in addition to imparting spiritual education that also includes respect for other faiths. Many Hindu monks have followed his footsteps in taking *Vedanta* abroad, and now *Yoga*, *Jnana* and *Bhakti* have a vogue and a following in western countries especially in the United States that could not have been conceived of, before the advent of Vivekananda and the one-man mission that he first took to America. The image of India as a dispenser of spirituality has certainly grown in recent years, justifying to some extent the hope that Vivekananda entertained that India will some day conquer the world by her religion and spiritual knowledge.

There can therefore be no doubt that, though not in politics, Swami Vivekananda has played a great role in the shaping of modern India, second if not equal to the role played by the God-conscious patriot Mahatma Gandhi who followed him. Secularism, socialism, mass uplift and mass power, women's liberation, abolition of untouchability, inclusion of social service as a part of religious worship, Hindu-Muslim unity, universal literacy and informal educa-

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tion—all these constitute the contribution of Swami Vivekananda to the building of modern India. Only what has been achieved is far below what he desired and strove for. In fact, modern India still continues to be confronted with the problems that Vivekananda tried to deal with so many years ago. Absence of mutual acceptance and respect for religions other than one's own, increasing inequalities in income and wealth, continuing mass poverty and illiteracy, accompanied by a class society seeking affluence, continuing dominance of rituals and ceremonials in religious practices, revival of casteism, continuing Hindu-Muslim discord and of atrocities on the so-called untouchables, increasing resort to violence and preaching of extremist creeds that seek to discard the past and fail to use its good points to evolve a better future, the failure of Practical *Vedanta* to take the place of the traditional religion of sense-gratification, market-bargaining and acceptance of the *status quo*, and the allround decline of values in all spheres of life—these are parts of the reality that constitutes modern India. To this extent, perhaps they point to the failure of Swami Vivekandanda's life and teachings to build a modern India of his lofty conception. Even the Ramakrishna Mission that he founded, though it has expanded much beyond its initial beginning at his hands, is still only a drop in the ocean as far as the practice of Practical *Vedanta* is concerned. While Hindu religious ideas and *Vedanta* philosophy, which he was the first monk to initiate in the west, has been spreading very fast and numerous Hindu monks and preachers have gone to America and Europe in his wake and under far more propituous and comfortable conditions, the fact remains that the west has also failed to accept his *Practical Vedanta*, as can be seen from the two world wars, the threat of atomic destruction, the continuing economic dominance of the west, and its exploitation of the poorer and less-developed nations of the non-western world.

Does this mean that Vivekananda has failed in the mission that

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he set out to achieve at such sacrifice and with so much effort? I would say yes and no. Ultimately, I hope it will be "no" that will constitute the final answer.

To the extent it has failed, it is because we have forgotten the cardinal thesis that Swami Vivekananda proclaimed in the famous lecture he delivered at the Victoria Hall, Madras on "My Plan of Campaign". He said then that each nation had one theme which is its centre, the principal note round which every other note comes to form the harmony. "In India", he asserted, "religious life forms the centre, the keynote of the whole music of national life; and if any nation attempts to throw off its national vitality, the direction which has become its own through the transmission of centuries, that nation dies if it succeeds in that attempt." Not that religion occupies a lesser place in the life of the Indian people than it did during the days of Vivekananda; but it is a religion which has forgotten its original purity and its *Vedantic* life-blood; and it is a religion that does not recognise the kinship of all religions. In fact, it is the very religion that Vivekananda strove to reform; and it is its resistance to that reform, not with standing little oases of understanding here and there, that makes modern India a desert in genuine spirituality. When Vivekananda talked of religion being the mainstream of Indian life, he was speaking from the knowledge of the history of the Indian people; and that historical trend continues to the present day in spite of the so-called sophistication and modernity that is supposed to characterise the India of our times. More temples, more churches, more mosques and more *viharas* have been built in the three decades more mosques and more *viharas* have been built in the decades turies; and there are more men preaching religion in modern India than ever in the past. But the religion they preach is traditional and not *Vedantic*: and the houses of God that are built follow the old ceremonials and rituals rather than the strengthening of character or the stimulation of universal love, which Vivekananda strove for.

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Purity from pollution and the like continues to masquerade as religion instead of internal purity of character leading to unselfish action. Religion in the real sense continues to remain divorced from all other walks of life and kept confined and secluded from work, motivation, everyday conduct, and inter-personal and inter-group relations. And the many religions that flourish in modern India do not live with genuine mutual respect or in mutual harmony, but merely suffer each other's presence under the shadow of the secularism guaranteed by the Constitution. What Vivekananda wanted was a reform of religion and the integration of this reformed religion with the whole of life. And, after him, Mahatma Gandhi made the same attempt. Vivekananda told his people: "Before flooding India with socialist or political ideas, first deluge the land with spiritual ideas. And after preaching spiritual knowledge along with it will come that secular knowledge and every other knowledge that you want." He told the young men of Lahore whom he addressed on November 12, 1897 on the *Vedanta* that they should see the same Lord as present everywhere and therefore stressed the need for universal love rather than love for one's own kith and kin or one's caste or sect or individual religion or other compartmental divisions of humanity. "Unfurl the banner of love", he thundered, "Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached." And what was the goal? The recognition of one's identity with the Universal Reality and therefore with the identity of everyone else. But this could not be achieved without renunciation. "If you want to help others", he told them, "your little self must go. You cannot serve God and Mammon at the same time. What matters if you die of starvation, you and I and thousands like us, so long as the nation lives? The curse of unnumbered millions is on our heads, to whom we have talked theoretically that we are all the same and all are one with the same Lord, without even an ounce of practice. Our insincerity in India is awful; what we want is character,

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that steadiness and character that make a man cling on to a thing like grim death. Let minor things and quarrels over little doctrines be thrown aside, for here is the greatest of all works, here are the sinking millions. Feel for them as the *Veda* teaches you, till you realise that you and they, the poor and the rich, the saint and the sinner, are all parts of One Infinite Whole, which you call *Brahman*." Vivekananda held the firm belief that material development and spiritual development must proceed side by side and told his disciples: "In this age, as on the one hand people have to be immensely practical, so on the other hand they have to acquire deep spiritual knowledge." By saying this, Vivekananda anticipated Acharya Vinoba Bhave who has been talking of the need for combining science with spirituality in the modern age.

Vivekananda did not stop with only preaching the *Vedanta* which owed its origin to the ancient Hindu scriptures. He also called other religions to his aid in his vision of India functioning on the basis of his Practical *Vedanta*. Speaking on "My Life and Mission" in California on January 27, 1900, he related the history of how he and his fellow-monks got their ideas from Sri Ramakrishna and together agreed that this ideal had to be spread. He continued: "And not only spread, but made practical. That is to say, we must show the spirituality of the Hindus, the mercifulness of the Buddhists, the activity of the Christians and the brotherhood of the Mohamadans by our practical lives."

It is this spiritual flavour that we find lacking in modern India today. And without spirituality, conscious acceptance of the identity of divinity that is found in all men, and preparedness to take to the service of man as constituting the worship of God, no amount of material development or progressive legislation or reformist or revolutionary institution-building can create the India of Vivekananda's vision. India may progress in approaching the western world in respect of power, science, technology and material development,

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but she will not reach the goal of a harmonious and happy nation unless she holds fast to religion, understanding it as spirituality that calls for universal love and service. What this country needs is what Vivekananda called Practical *Vedanta* and what I have termed *Vedantic* Socialism. Given the spiritual base, all our efforts at development and modernisation will yield rich dividends in terms not only of material comforts and intellectual satisfaction, but also in terms of peace, harmony and happiness. If we neglect the spiritual side, as we have been doing so far in modern India, and fail to integrate it with everyday life, we can go only the way of all flesh, adding Indian civilisation to the many civilisations that have had their day and now belong to history. It is not enough to revere or even worship the person Vivekananda or the name Vivekananda. As he said repeatedly, it is the ideas, the principles, which he propounded, that need understanding, acceptance, and then, implementation. Only then would modern India have done justice to its Vivekananda inheritance.

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Glossary

Abhijnana Sakuntala— a famous play of Kalidasa

Advaita — non-Dualism , Monism

— the doctrine of Monism which teaches that only the Ultimate Principle is integral, whole and unsplit

Akasha — infinite, omnipresent material of this universe

— ether, space

Atman — Soul or the Absolute

Avatar — incarnation of god; descent of the Divine

Bhajan — devotional song

— singing God's praises, especially in chorus.

Bhakta — lover and devotee of god

Bhakti — devotion to God

Bhakti Marga — path of devotion

— a general name given to those sects of modern Hinduism which lay stress on the importance of Bhakti or devotional faith, as a means of salvation, as opposed to Karmamarga (work-path) and jnana-marga (knowledge-path)

Bhakti Yoga — the yoga of devotion

Bhava Samadhi — A trance in which one is conscious of one's mental modification only

Bhiksha — alms or food given to a *bhikshu*, a religious mendicant

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Brahmacharins — celibates

Brahman — God
— the Supreme Reality, the Divine, the Absolute

Brahmo Samaj — "Society of Brahman"
— a theistic reforming movement springing from Hinduism started by Raja Rammohun Roy

Chandalas — the pariahs

Daridra-Narayan — God in the form of the poor

Dharma — the law or the rule of nature, action and life

Duratman — bad self or soul

Dwaita — Dualism

Fakir — mendicant

Gita — a song, a composition, short form of Bhagavad-Gita, the song of the Divine

Go-matas — the cows

Gurudeva — spiritual guide, mentor

Gurukula — educational institution

Ishta Devatha — chosen God

Japa — repetition of a sacred word or syllable or a name of God

Jnana Yoga — the Yoga of Knowledge

Karma Yoga — the path of attaining the Divine by means of action

Kaupin — loin-cloth

Kirtan — devotional singing with dancing

Kshatriya — the ruling warrior class of India; one of the four orders of the Hindu Social culture whose natural work is heroism, high resolution, ability, not fleeing in battle

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Kumara Sambhava — an epic by Kalidasa, usually translated "The Birth of the War-God", relating how Parvati won the love of Shiva in order to bring into the world Kumara, the God of war to destroy the demon Taraka

Mahabharata — the great Epic of India; the Epic of the Pandava and Kaurava princes

Mahasamadhi — profound trance for a long period
— death of a Saint

Mahat — the cosmic mind
— the Sankhya principle of Buddhi or Intelligence

Mahatmas — the great souls
— enlightened persons

Mantra — cosmic sound forms of the *Vedas* used for worship and prayer
— seed letters for meditation on the form of the Lord
— ritual incantation

Math — Monastery

Maya — illusion, the power of creating illusion
— the power of the three modes of Nature
— the divine consciousness in its power of various self-representation of its being

Moksha / *Mukti* — Liberation of soul

Mrichchakatika — "The Little Clay Cart", a Sanskrit play by Sudraka

Narayanas — The divine souls
— the God-heads in humanity

Nirvikalpa Samadhi — the highest state of concentration in which the soul loses all sense of being different from the universal self, but a temporary

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state from which there is a return to ego-consciousness.

Nyaya — Propriety or fitness, the proper method of arriving at a conclusion by analysis

— A logical school of philosophy

Pandit — one versed in Hinduism, who interprets and expounds the law of Hinduism

— learned expert or teacher

Para Bhakta — great devotee of God

Pathashala — school

Prabuddha Bharata — Awakened India

Prakriti — Nature, the cosmic creative, active and executive energy

— matter as opposed to spirit

— the Sakti or female energy of any diety.

Pujari — one who conducts worship in a Hindu temple or shrine and performs public pujas

Puranas — works containing traditional tales of the life of *Avatars*, kings, sages, etc.

Purusha-Prakriti — the great biune duality of Being and its Nature-Force, which means spirit and matter

Raghuvansha — Kalidasa's best poetic work, treats of the life of Rama, together with a record of his ancestors and descendants

Raja-Yoga — the principal system of *Yoga* as taught by Patanjali

Ramayana — A Hindu Epic relating the adventures of Rama written by Valmiki

Rig Veda — One of the four *Vedas*; the Veda of the Riks or the words of illumination

Rishis — seers, sages

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Rudraksha — a tree (Elaeocarpus Canitrus) whose berries are regarded as sacred and used as rosaries

Sadhana — the practice of *Yoga*
— method of spiritual practice

Sadhu — ascetic, sage

Samadhi — the Yogic state of trance or Superconsciousness

Sanatan Dharma — eternal law implicit in the *Vedas* and *Dharma Shastras*

Sankhya — one of the six systems of Indian philosophy; its founder was Kapila
— the way of Knowledge as opposed to the way of work

Sanyas — complete renunciation of life and work

Sanyasins — those who renounce life completely
— ascetics

Santhal — a tribe of Chhota Nagpur and West Bengal

Sevashram — social service home

Shakti — force, energy

Shaligrama-Shila — a sacred black stone dedicated to Vishnu and available only in the river Gandak

Shastras — Scriptures

Shiva — the third deity of the Hindu Trinity; the destroyer of the world, in his good, beneficial aspect

Shiva-linga — phallic form of the God Shiva

Shudras — one of the four orders of the Hindu Social culture, whose natural function is all work of the character of service

Tamas — one of the modes of Nature whose quality is inertia

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Tantras — rule, ritual; the chief peculiarity of the Tantras is the prominence they give to the female energy of the deity, his active nature being personified in the person of his Shakti or wife

Tirthas — places of pilgrimage

Tulsi — Indian basil (Ocymum Sanctum)

Tyagi — one who renounces the world

Upanishads — works of revelatory knowledge, seen by ancient seers

Vaishnavism — the religion devoted to the worship of Vishnu and his two chief incarnations Rama and Krishna, with their consorts

Viraja Homa — a *homa* performed during the ritual of Sanyas (*homa*—a sacrifice in the course of which articles are offered to the fire to be burnt)

Virat — totality of gross beings

Vishishtadwaita — the philosophy of qualified Monism of Ramanuja

Yoga — one of the six systems of Indian philosophy; its founder was Patanjali

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INDEX

Abhedananda, Swami, 221
Abhaya, 181
Abhayananda, Swami (Madame Marie Louise), 85, 94, *See also* Louise, Madame Marie
Abhedananda, Swami (Kali), 49, 54, 100, 107, 125, 127 *See also* Kali
Abhidya, 153
Abhijnana Sakuntala, 56
Absolute, 32, 50, 149
Acchbal, 112, 119
Adam, 211
Adbhutananda, Swami (Latu), 49 *See also* Latu
Adi Brahmo Samaj, 5 *See also* Brahmo Samaj
Advaita, 23, 27, 28, 29, 30, 33, 50, 60, 70, 74, 79, 122, 145, 146, 148, 150, 151, 161, 166, 176 (*See also Tantra*) : *Advaita Ashram*, 124 ; *Advaitin Vedantin*, 166 *Advaitin Vedantists*, 149 ; *Advaitin(s)*, 145, 147, 149; *Advaitism*, 148
Advaitananda, Swami (Gopal Senior), 49 *See also* Gopal Senior
Agra, 52
Aham Brahmasmi, 44
Ahimsa, 153, 157
Ahmed Khan, a musician, 8
Ahmedabad, 61
Ajmer, 60, 112
Akasha, 148
Akhandananda, Swami, 54, 55, 62, 107, 223
Alaknanda, river, 55
Alam bazar, 97, 105, 106
Allahabad, 53, 55, 110, 240
Almora, 54, 55, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 118, 119, 124, 175
Alwar, 57, 112 ; Maharaja of, 58
Amarnath, 119, 120
Ambala, 112
Ambedkar, 241
America, references about Vivekananda's visit to, 63, 64, 70, 73, 74, 81, 82, 83, 84, 88, 91, 94, 96, 100, 113, 127, 128, 170, 210, 214, 227, 229, 247
American, a periodical, 95
Amritsar, 112
Anantnag, 112
Anarchism, 198
Anavasada, 154
Anuddharha, 154
Arjuna, 168
Arya Samaj : Arya Samajist (s), 113; in Punjab, 7
Aryan civilisation, 64; Aryans, 115
Asceticism, 210
Ashapuri, 62
Ashrama(s), 108, 124
Assam, 131
'Assimilation and not Destruction' 80
Assissi, 99

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Digitized by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust.

Aswini Babu, 118
Athens, 129
Atman, 106, 134, 181, 193, 215
Avantipur, 119
Avatar(s), 5, 31, 60, 117. 218, 222, 224
Ayodhya, 52

Baburam (Swami Premananda), 42, 49 *See also* Premananda, Swami
Badrikashrama, 54, 55
Badrinarayan, 52
Bagha, a dog, 132
Bahudhah Vadanti, 59
Balaram Babu 108, 240
Bangalore, 63, 64
Bangla Desh, 131, *See also* Bengal, East
Baramula, 112, 121
Baranagore, 47, 48, 49, 52, 54, 56
Bareilly, 112
Baroda. 62
Barrows, Dr 76, 77
Belgaum, 62, 63
Belur, 109, 121, 129 ; Belur Math, 109-110, 131, 192
Bengal (Bengali), 5, 6, 7, 8, 66, 83, 102, 220, 236 ; East, 131, 132
Bengal Spectator, a journal, 3
Bernhardt, Madame Sarah, 129
Besant, Annie, 77; on Vivekananda, 204
Bhagalpur, 54
Bhagavad Gita, 78, 86, 93, 145, 161 *See also Gita*
Bhagavata, 118, 161
Bhakta, 155, 159, 166, 229
Bhakti (*Dwaita*), 30, 32, 110, 111, 118, 121, 122, 145, 152, 154, 156, 157, 162, 166 (*See also Dwaita*) ; *Bhakti Maya*, 151, 154 ; *Bhakti Yoga* (*See Yoga*)
Bhartrihari, 188
Bharatvarshiya Brahmo Samaj, 5 *See also* Brahmo Samaj
Bhate, Prof G.S., 62
Bhattacharya, Manmatha Nath, 70
Bhava Samadhi, 110, 120
Bhavnagar, 61
Bhiksha, 116
Bhoga, 223
Bhuj 61, 62
Bible, the, 8, 57, 147
Blissful Providence, 37
Bodh Gaya, 43
Bohemian, 15 ; Bohemian temperament, 18 ; Bohemians, 15
Bois, Monsieur Jules, 129
Bombay, 62, 74, 75, 100
Bose, Balaram, 54
Bose, Dr. J.C., 129
Boston, 76, 84
Botthiel, Prof Richard, 128
Brahmacharya, 132 ; *Brahmacharins* 87, 108, 133, 229 ; *Brahmacharis*, 113, 129, 136
Brahman, 26, 31, 40, 44, 53, 60, 67, 70, 134, 149, 177, 250
Brahmana, 122
Brahmananda, Swami (Rakhal), 49, 74, 109, 116, 191, 221, 222 225 *See also* Rakhal
Brahmavadin, 90, 92, 93, 95, 98
Brahmin 13, 32, 115, 174, 177, 192, 196, 220 ; *Brahmins*, 57; 165, 220
Brahmo religion, 5 ; Brahmo Samaj, 4-5, 18, 19, 24, 33, 77 : establishment, 4-5 ; Bharatvarshiya

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Brahmo Samaj, 5 ; Debendranath Tagore for, 5; in Bengal, 4, 5 ; in Calcutta 5, Keshab Chandra Sen for, 5 ; Raja Rammohun Roy for, 4-5 ; Sadharam Brahmo Samaj, 5, 7, 18 ; split in, 5
"Breezy Meadows", 76
Brindavan, 52
British rule in India, 1-2
Brittany, 129
Brooklyn, 84, 95 ; Brooklyn Ethical Association, 84
Buddhism. 129, 141, 142, 146, 161
Buddha, 29, 87, 88, 115, 117, 126, 147, 159, 160, 161, 163, 176, 224, "Buddha's Message to the World", 126 ; Buddhists, 250
Bull, Mrs Ole, 85, 96, 228
Butler, Prof N.M ; 128

Calcutta, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 14, 20, 21, 34, 37, 42, 54, 70, 71, 83, 88, 98, 100, 104, 105, 107, 109, 112, 113, 115, 116, 117, 118, 125, 131, 132, 215, 219, 240 ; plague in, 116
California, 125, 126, 127, 128, 177, 206, 250
Calve, Madame, 86, 129
Carlyle, Thomas, 63
Caste system, 18, 52, 69, 175
Castle Kernan, 104
Ceylon (Sri Lanka), 102, 103
Chakravarti, 77
Chandala, 67, 112, 122, 192
Chandranath, 131
Chati, 55
Chatterjee, Bankim Chandra, 6, 7
Chicago, references of, about Parliament of Religions, in, 62, 63, 65, 75, 76, 77, 81, 84, 125, 128, 167, 187, 204, 209, 212 ; Chicago World Fair, 76 *See also* Parliament of Religions
Child marriage, 6, 244
China, 200
Christianity in India (Christian religion) (faith), 3, 4, 5, 29, 30, 64, 67, 141, 142. 146, 161 ; Christian(s), 95, 158, 250 ; Civilisation, 218 ; ideals, 5 ; Jesus Christ, 5, 29, 47 81, 82, 87, 95, 126, 135, 161, 163, 216, 218, "Christ's Message to the World", 126 ; missionaries (missions), 2, 5, 6, 81, 92, 112, 211 ; prayer, 159
Christine, Sister, 89, 229 ; on Vivekananda, 89-90
Clapham sect, 2
Cohn, Prof. A. 128
Colombo, 75, 102, 103
Comte, Auguste, 15
Congress, 235
Congress of the History of Religions, 127, 129
Congress of Scientists, 129
Constantinople, 129
Cooch-Behar, Maharaja of, 5
Cossipore garden, 43, 47, 89, 105, 195
Cow Protection Society, 106

Dacca, 41, 123, 131
Dakshineshwar, 16, 19, 21, 24, 33, 37, 41, 85, 90, 120, 127, 141; Kali temple. 6. 20

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Dandi, 55
Daridra devo bhava, 169
Daridra-narayanas, 164, 167, 170, 226
Darjeeling, 107, 113, 169, 221
Darwin, 64
Dasya-dasa, 190
Datta, Akshay Kumar, 5
Datta, Durga Charan, grandfather of Vivekananda, 8 ; became a monk, 8
Datta, Ram Mohan, great-grandfather of Vivekananda, 7-8
Day, Dr. Allan, 85
Daya, 153
Deb, Radha Kanta, 3 : as founder of Hindu College, 3 ; opened Sanskrit College, 3 ; opened Hindu Metropolitan College, 3
Dehra Dun, 55
Delhi, 56, 57, 62, 112
Demidoff, Princess, 129
Derozia, Henry, 3
Desha, 149
Detroit, 94
Deussen, Prof Paul, 99
Dharma, 66, 68, 133
Dharamshala, 112
Dhyana Siddha, 11
Dickens, Charles, 63
Divine Mother (Kali Mother), 24, 25, 27, 28, 38, 44, 67, 72, 73, 77, 108, 120, 121, 127, 130, 141, 177, 186, 210, 225, 226, 230 *See also* Kali Mother
Divine Providence, 17
Diwakar, R.R., 30
Dualist *Vedanta*, 150
Dubois, Abbe ; on people of India, 2
Duff, Alexander ; *India and Indian Missions*, by, 3 ; on Hindu religion (Indian people), 2-3; work for Christianity, 5
Duratma, 168
Dutcher, Miss, 86
Dutta, Jogesh Chandra ; on Vivekananda, 117-18
Dwaita, 30, 146 (*See also* Bhakti), *Dwaitins*, 145
Dwarka, 62
"(The) East and the West", lectures on, 82

East India Company 2, 8
Education, 180, 181-82
Egypt, 129
Ekadashi, 135
Ekam Sat Vipra Bahudhah Vadanti, 142
Ekam Sat, 59
"Excursion", 16
England (*See also* British), 5, 92, 94, 96, 99, 125, 221, anti-slavery movement in, 2
Engalsmann, Prof, E, 128
Europe, 99 ; Eastern, 200, 247

Famine(s), 7, 55 ; of 1864, 115; relief work, 107
"Father Pope", 212
Francis, St. of Assissi, 98
Funk, Mrs. Mary C, 204-205
"(The) Future of India", 104

Gandhi, Mahatma, 77, 102, 235, 236, 238, 239, 241, 243, 246, 249; Gandhian socialism, 165-66
Ganesh prayag, 55

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Ganga, river, (Ganges) 19, 55, 117, 137, 192
Ganpati, 131
Gargi, Maitreyee, 177
Garhwal, 55
Garibi-hatao, 198
Gaya, 131
Geddes, Patrick, 129
General Assembly's College, 15
General Assembly's Institution, 14
Gentile, 158
Genuine, 220
Gerua, 133, 169
Ghats, 132
Ghazipur, 53
Ghose, Dr. Trailokya Nath, 55
Ghose, Gopal Chandra, 42
Gibbons, Cardinal, 77
Gita, the, 63, 109, 113, 118, 126, 141, 142, 145, 158, 161, 180, 227 *See also Bhagavad Gita*
God, 7, 19, 23, 26, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 35, 36, 37, 47, 53, 70, 123, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 153, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 162, 163, 165, 166, 167, 171, 175, 180, 185, 195, 199, 205, 211, 216, 218, 219, 222, 223, 226, 229, 248, 249, 250
God-Consciousness, 20, 57, 211, 246; God-intoxication, 5; God-realisation, 6, 49, 50, 51, Personal God, 166, Universal aspect of 185
Godwin, J. J, 94, 100
Gokhale, Gopal Krishna, 242
Gopal Junior, 42
Gopal Senior (Swami Advaitananda), 42, 47, 49 *See also* Advaitananda, Swami
Gopalpura 131
"(The) Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna", 28, 142
Goswami, Prof Tirath Rama, 113
Goswami, Vijay Krishna, 18, 24, 25, 41
Government Plague Regulation, 116
Govind, Guru, 240
Gowree, 151, 162
Grant, Charles ; on Hindu religion, 2
Great Britain, 98 *See also* England
Green Stidel, Miss Christine (Sister Christine) on Vivekananda's stay in America, 88-89
Grey, Prof Elisha, 97
Gujarat, 123
Gupta, Bani, a musician, 8
Guru(s), 18, 19, 21, 37, 45, 53, 85, 88, 162, 209 ; role of, 151-52
Gurubhai(s), 53, 56, 67, 96, 97, 102, 106, 107, 110, 111, 226
Gurukula system, 132

Hafiz, Persian poet, 8
Hale, George, 212, 214
Hale, George (Miss), 208, 210, 212, 213, 214, 228 ; on Vivekananda, 208
Hale, George W (Mrs), 77
Hansi, a goat, 132
Hanuman, Lord, 17
Hare, David, 115
Hari (Swami Turiyananda), 49 *See also* Turiyananda Swami
Hari Prasanna (Swami Vijnanananda) 49. *See also* Vijnanananda, Swami
Hari Singh, Sardar, 59

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Haribhai, 74, 166
'Harmony and Peace and not Dissension', 80
Hartford Daily Times, on Vivekananda, 95
Hastie, William, 15, 16,19
Hathras, 52
Hazru, Mr., 26, 28
Hegel, 48, 71
Helmhotz, Prof, 97
'Help and not Fight', 80
Himalayas, 54, 65, 99, 115, 117, 215
Hindu Muslim unity, 58 ,239 240 246, 247
Hinduism (Hindu religion) (Hindu Community), 2-4, 5, 6, 18, 29, 30, 41, 53, 69, 77, 78, 79, 83, 84, 116, 129, 142, 146, 174, 220, 221, 236, 239, 240, 241 ; Alexander Duff, on, 2-3; Charles Grant on,2; concept of *Vedanta*, 199; Concept of worship, 159; Culture, 81; faith, 245; Hindu College, 3; Hindu Metropolitan College, 3; Hindus, 4, 12, 18, 40, 52, 57, 58, 59, 60, 67, 72, 77, 83, 103, 189, 195, 213, 219, 239, 240, 250; race, 188; Scriptures, 4, 63, 78, 93, 147, 151, 250; Social System, 172; Society, 173, 186; *Vedanta*, 240; William Wisberforce on, 2
"(The) Hindus and the Needs', 98
History of Religions, 127
Holboister, Marie, 211
(The) Holy Mother (Sarada Devi) 41, 54 *See also* Sarada Devi
"Home of Truth", 126
Hong kong, 75
Hopitallia, Aviton, 97
Hrishikesh, 52, 55
Hume, 15
Huntingdon, Helen, on Vivekananda 95
Hyacinthe, Pere, 129
Hyderabad, 72, 73

Idol worship, 38, 58, 59 *See also* Worship
India and Indian Missions, a book by Alexander Duff, 3
Indian Society, State of, at the time of Vivekananda, 1-7
Indore, 62, 112
Ireland, 98
"Is *Vedanta* Philosophy the Future Religion", 126
Ishta Devata, 31, 59, 162, 173
Islam (Islamic faith), 4, 30, 64, 99, 119, 141, 142, 146, 161, 240
Islamabad, 119
Iyengar, Biligiri, 104
Iyer, K. Seshadri, Sr, 63
Iyer, Subramanya, Justice, 104
Iyer, Sundararama, Prof, 64

Jackson, Prof A.V.W, 128
Jadunath Mallick, garden of, 24
Jaffna, 103
Jah, Nawab Bahadur Khurshid, 72
Jah, Sir Ashmen, 72
Jainism, 141, 142; Jains, 77
Jaipur, 59, 60
James, William, 96; on Vivekananda, 97; *The Variety of Religious Experience*, a book by, 97

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Jammu, 112
James, Dr. Lewis G, 84
Japa (s) 49, 215
Jealousy, 187-88, 189
Jesus Christ *See* Christianity
Jew, 158; Jewish history, 64
Jhansi, Rani of, 244
Jhelum, river, 119
Jnana 110, 111, 122, 148, 151, 159, 210, 229, 246; *Jnana Yoga (See also Yoga)*, 85, 97, 145, 150, 154, 156, 158, 162, 166
Jodhpur, 112
Jones, Sam, 211
Junagadh, 61

Kali (Swami Abhedananda), 42, 43, 47, 49 *See also* Abhedananda, Swami
Kali, Mother, (Divine Mother) 10, 31, 32, 38, 40, 44, 45, 120, 141, 145, 210; Kali temple, 20, 25, 39 *See also* Divine Mother
Kalidasa, 64
Kamakhya, 131
Kant, 15, 48, 71
Kanya Kumari, 65, 67, 68, 69; Kanya Kumari temple, 65
Karma, 90, 156, 173, 208, 210, 225; *Karma Yoga*, 94, 110, 145, 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 162, 163, 166 *See also Yoga*
Karma yogi, 159
Karna prayag, 55
Kashmir, 113
Kathgodam, 129
Kaupin, 131
Kedarnath, 52
Kelvin, Lord, 97
Keshta, 133
Khandwa, 62, 112
Khetri, 60, 61, 73, 74, 112; Maharaja of, 60, 61, 73, 74, 75, 113
Kidderpore, 104
Kishangarh, 112
Kobe, 75
Kolhapur, 62
Koran, 147
Kripananda, Swami (Leon Landsberg) 85, 91, 94, *See also* Landsberg, Leon
Krishna Bahadur, Maharaja, 72
Krishna, Lord (Sri), 31, 50, 59, 62, 115, 161, 168, 180, 227; "Krishna's Message to the world", 126
Kshatriya, 115, 196, 198
Kshir Bhavani, 120
Kumara Sambhava 56
Kumbhakonam, 104

Lahore, 112, 113, 121, 249
Landsberg, Leon (Swami Kripananda), *See* Kripananda, Swami
Lannin, 129
Laskar, Guru Charan, 57
Latu (Swami Adbhutananda), 43, 47, 49 *See also* Adbhutananda, Swami
Legget, Francis, 85, 96, 98, 125, 127; Mrs Legget, 85, 125, 127
Limbdi, 61
Linga, 120
Literary Society of Triplicane, 70
Logan, Dr., 136
London, 92, 93, 96, 97, 99, 100, 125, 175, 194, 210
Los Angeles, 125, 126, 127

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Louise, Madame Marie (Swami Abhayananda), 85 *See also* Abhayananda, Swami
Low, Prof Seth, 128
Lucknow, 52

Macleod, Miss J, 86, 127, 225, 228
Madhwa, 145
Madison Square Garden, New York, 94
Madras, 70, 71, 73, 75, 82, 92, 100, 102, 104, 107, 118, 168, 173, 188, 189, 194, 195, 199, 219, 220, 221, 223, 244, 248
Madurai, 65, 104
Mahabharata, 9, 161
Maharaja of Alwar, 59
Maharashtra, 7, 66
Mahasamadhi, *45*, *46*, *60* *See also* *Samadhi*
Mahat, 149
Mahatma(s), 91, 168
Mahboob College, 72 73
Mahesh Yogi, Maharshi, 10
Mahout, 28
Manamadurai, 104
Mandvi, 62
Mangal Singh, Shri, Maharaja of Alwar, 58, 59
Manmatha, 215
Mantra, 87
"Mantru", a kid, 132
Manu, 177
Martand, 119;
Marx, 119, 197; Marxism, 197; Marxists, 193
Math(s), 48, 54, 108, 109, 116, 121, 122, 129, 131, 132, 133, 135, 136, 137, 221, 223, 224, 229, 230, 244
Matru Devo Bhava, 169
Max Muller, Prof, 98
Maxim, Hiram, 129
Maya, 56, 89, 106, 148, 149,150, 162, 175, 197, 215, 216
Mayavaram, 104
Mayavati, 124, 129, 130, 131; Mayavati Ashram, 100
Mazumdar, 77
Mclouth, Prof. N.A., 128
Meerut, 55, 56
Mill, John Stuart, 15, 18, 48; *Three Essays on Religion*, by, 18
Miller, Miss Henrietta, 92, 99, 100
Mimamsa, 48
Misra, Babu Haripada, 62, 63
Mitra, Surendra Nath, 19, 48, 54
"Modern India" 186
Mohammed, Prophet, 29, 161, 163, 183, 240; "Mohammed's Message to the World", 126
'Mohammedananda, 117, 240
Mohammedans *See* Muslims
Moksha, 158, 167; Hindu belief in, 167
Monks, 42, 52, 55, 56, 124, 131, 132, 169, 246; of Ramakrishna Order, 42
Moorkha devo bhava, 169
Mother, the, *See* Divine Mother (Kali
"Mother Church", 212
Moulvi Saheb, 57
Mount Abu, 60
Mount Girnar, 61
Mricchakatika, 56
Mukherjee, Nilamber, 121
Mukti, 88, 106, 110, 122, 123, 133
Muree, 112
Murshidabad, 107
Musalmans *See* Muslims

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Muslims, 12, 13, 57, 58, 67, 72, 114, 117, 161, 240, 250
"My Life and Mission", 250
"My Master Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa", 94
"My Plan of Campaign", 104, 170, 195, 199, 248
Mysore, 63, 73

Nagasaki, 75
Nainital, 54, 117, 118, 240
Nair, S.K., 64
Nama, 149
Naples, 100, 102
Nara, 22
Narayan-Sarovar, 62
Narayana, 22
Narayanas, 67, 133
Narada, 151
Naren (Narendra Nath), Original name of Vivekananda *See* Vivekananda, Swami
Nava Vidhan, 5
"(The) Necessity of Religion", 97
Nehru, Jawaharlal, 236
"New Bengal", a group, 3
New York, 84, 86, 92, 91, 95, 96, 125, 127, 128; *New York American*, a journal, 205; New York Society, 85
Nihilism, 198
Nimitta, 149
Niranjan (Swami Niranjanananda), 42, 49 *See also* Niranjanananda, Swami
Niranjanananda, Swami, (Niranjan), 49, 102
Nirbhayananda, Swami, 107
Nirvana, 155
Nirvikalpa Samadhi, 50, 67, 89, 111, 132, 141, 145, 151, 209, 230 *See also Samadhi*
Nityananda, Swami, 107
Nivedita, Sister, (Miss Margaret Noble), 40, 93, 99, 100, 113, 114, 116, 118, 119, 121, 125, 223 (*See also* Noble, Miss Margaret); "Notes of Some Wanderings with Swami Vivekananda", by, 114; on Vivekananda, 135
Nizam of Hyderabad, 72
Noble, Miss Margaret *See* Nivedita, Sister
"Notes of Some Wanderings with Swami Vivekananda", 114
Nyaya, 48

Pahalgam, 119
Palitana, 62
Pamban, 103
Pampur, 112
Pandits, 48
Pandrenathan, temple, 119
Pandurang, Pandit Shankar *See* Shankar Pandurang, Pandit
Pavhari Baba, a saint of Ghazipur, 53
Panini, 61
Para Bhakti, 151, 155, 162
Para Brahman (or the Universal Reality), 18, 33, 40
Paramahamsa Deva, 224
Pariah, 32, 220
Paris, 92, 127, 128, 129, 229. Paris Exposition of 1900, 127
Parivrajaka, 166

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Parliament of Religions at Chicago (America), 49, 62, 63, 65, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 125, 128, 173, 188, 204, 208, 209 ; opened, 77
Parthasarathy, Mr, 168
Parthenon, a journal, 3
Pasadena, 127
Patan, 61
Patanjali, 53, 61 ; *Mahabhashya* (the great commentary on Panini's grammar), by, 61
Path of knowledge, 97 *See also Jnana Yoga*
Penang, 75
Personal God, 166 *See also* God
Perumal, Alasinga, 73, 75
Phrenological Journal, of New York, 206-7
Phule-Karve-Ranade contribution of, in Maharashtra, 7
Pitru Devo Bhava, 169
Polygamy, 6
Pondicherry, 69, 70
Poona, 62
Porbandar, 61, 62
Prabuddha Bharata, 15, 118, 124
"Practical *Vedanta*", 99, 165, 166, 193, 226, 230 *See also Vedanta*
Prakasananda, Swami, 107
Prakriti, 55
Prana, 148
Prasthanas, 145
Premananda, Swami (Baburam) 49, 136, 137 *See also* Baburam
Presidency College, 14
Price, Prof Thomas R, 128
Punjab, 7, 66, 113 Arya Samaj, in, 7
Puranas, 57, 141, 145, 161, 199
Purusha-Sukta, 174
Radha, 30
Radha-Krishna, 118
Raghuvamsha, 71
Raipur, 14, 17
Raja of Ramnad, 103
Raja yoga See Yoga
Rajas, 192
Rajasic, 243, 244
Rajasthan, 61
Rakhal (Swami Brahmananda), 38, 42, 47, 48, 49 *See also* Brahmananda, Swami
Rama, Lord, 17
Rama Tirtha, Swami, 113
(Sri) Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11-12, 14, 15, 16, 19, 20-46, 47, 49, 50, 53, 58, 59, 86, 98, 105, 107, 108, 109, 111, 114, 115, 116, 118, 122, 124, 126, 133, 141, 142, 161, 163, 195, 210, 217, 219, 222, 223, 226, 228 ; and Vivekananda, 20-46 ; death, 45 ; mission 40 ; monks of order of, 42 ; Ramakrishna Home of Service, 132 ; *Ramakrishna—His Life and Sayings*, a book, 98 ; Ramakrishna Math, 110 ; Ramakrishna Mission, 90, 107-110, 111, 221, 229, 245, 246, 247 ; aims and ideals of, 108-9, registered, 109 ; Ramakrishna Order, 111; "The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna", 28, 142
Ramakrishnananda, Swami (Shashi), 49, 107, 221, 223 *See also* Shashi
Ramanuja, 145, 153
Ramayana, 9, 161
Rameshwaram, 65, 70, 104 ; Great Shiva temple at, 103

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Ramnad, 65, 73, 104
Rani of Jhansi, 244
Rawalpindi, 112
"(The) Real and the Apparent Man", 97
Realisation, 97
Religion, 141-64, 249 ; Vivekananda on, 141-64
"(The) Religion of Arabia and Mohammed the Prophet", 126
Renunciation, 97
Rig Veda, 59, 71 *See also Vedas*
Rishis, 64, 82, 91, 173, 177
Roman Catholic Church, 77
Roy, Raja Rammohun, 4, 6, 115 ; death, 5 ; established Brahmo Samaj, 4 ; on Hindu religion, 4
Royal Institute of Painters, Piccadilly (London), 97
Rudraksha, 43
Rudraprayag, 55
Rupa, 149
Ruppolo, 94

S.S. Peninsular of the P & O Co , 75
Sadananda, Swami, on Vivekananda, 48
Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, 5, 7, 18 *See also* Brahmo Samaj
Sadhana(s), 30, 49, 58, 123, 133, 210, 216
Sadhu(s), 11, 43, 217
"(The) Sages of India," 104
Samabhava, 31
Samadhi(s), 20, 26, 31, 41, 42, 45, 85, 209, 226 ; Mahasamadhi, 45, 46, 60, *See also Nirvikalpa Samadhi*
San Francisco, 126
San Francisco Vedantic Society, 136
Sanatan Dharma, 61, 62, 113
Sanborn, Miss Kate, 76
Sankara, the great, 145, 153
Sankaracharya, Sri, 62, 99
Sankhya, 6, 48 ; philiosophy, 6
Santal, 132, 229
Sanskrit College, 3, 6
Sanyas(a), 12, 37, 39, 48, 49, 124 ; *Sanyasi*, 11, *Sanyasin(s)*, 6, 67, 74, 77, 83, 85, 94, 96, 103, 107, 108, 110, 113, 116, 120 123, 128, 131, 133, 167, 183, 220, 226, 228, 229, 242, 244, 245, American *Sanyasins*, 94
Sarada (Swami Trigunatitananda), 49 *See also* Trigunatitananda, Swami
Sarada Devi (The Holy Mother), 41, 73, 222, 226
Sarada *Math*, 62
Saradananda, Swami, 96, 97, 100, 107; on Vivekananda, 98
Saraswati, Goddess, 77
Sarathi, 168
Sarkar, Dr. Mahendralal, 41, 42
Sattvika, 192
Satya, 153
Saurashtra, 61
Schopenhauer, 15
Scottish Church College, 14
Scottish Mission Board, 14
Seal, Brojendranath, 18; on Vivekananda, 15, 207
Seal, Gopal Lal, 105
Secularism, 239, 241, 246, 249

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Sehore, 61
Sen, Keshab Chandra, 5, 7, 24, 25; work for Brahmo Samaj, 5
Setupati, Bhaskara, Raja of Ramnad 65,
Sevashramas, 107
Sevier, Mr. 99, 100, 118, 129; Mrs, 99, 100, 118, 129, 130
Shakespeare, 64
Shakti, 122, 123, 134
Shakti pata Deeksha, 45
Shaligrama-Shila, 129
Shankar Pandurang, Pandit, 61
Shanti Ashrama (Peace Retreat) 126
Saradananda, Swami, 136
Sharat, 42, 209
Shashi (Swami Ramakrishnananda), 42, 45, 48, 49 *See also* Ramakrishnananda, Swami
Shastras, 52, 64, 124, 133, 136, 141, 220; *Shastric* injunctions, 186
Shastri, Pandit Shiva Nath, 18
Shelley, Poet, 16
Shiv Raj Bahadur, Maharaja, 72
Shiva, Lord, 104, 115, 120; *Shiva-Linga*, 129; Shiva temple, 65
Shivananda, Swami (Tarak), 49 *See also* Tarak
Shuddhananda, Swami, 135
Shudra(s), 69, 175, 196, 198, 220
Shukla Yajur Veda, 135, *See also Veda(s)*
Shyampukur, 41
Sihler, Prof E.G, 128
Sikhism, 142
Sivaganga, 104
Sivananda, Swami, 102
Smritis, 177
Social reforms, 18
Socialism, 241; Gandhian, 165-66; Vedantic, 165-200, 237, 251
"Some Aspects of my work in India", 104
Somnath, 61; Somnath temple, 61
Southampton, 100
Soviet Union, 200
Spencer, Herbert, 15, 48, 64
Srinagar, 55, 112, 119, 120, 191
St. Lawrence, river, 86, 89, 90, 205
Street, Dr. (Yogananda), 94-95 *See also* Yogananda
Sturdy, E.T., 92, 93, 99 on Vivekananda, 93
Subodh *See* Subodhananda, Swami
Subodhananda, Swami (Subodh), 49
Sufis of Islam, 99
Sunday Times, London, 194
Surdas, Song of, 74
Sutras, 86
"(The) Swami Pine", 84
Swaraj, 225; *Poorna Swaraj*, 235
Swarupananda, Swami, 118
Switzerland, 99, 211

Tagore, Debendranath, 5, 6-7, 19, 141; work for Brahmo Samaj, 5
Tamas, 110, 192
Tanjavur, 104
Tantra(s) *(Advaita)*, 30, 105 *(See also Advaita)*; Tantric practices, 216
Tapasya, 135, 229
Tarachand, Dr; on people of India, 2
Tarak (Swami Shivananda), 42, 43, 47, 49 *See also* Shivandanda Swami

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Tat Twam Asi, 150
Tattva Bodhini Patrika, a journal, 5
Thomas, Prof Calvin, 128
Thompson, Sir William, 97
Thousand Island Park, 86, 88, 89, 90,
Three Essays on Religion, by Mill, 15 18,
Tilak, Bal Gangadhar, 62, 235
Tiruchirapalli, 104
"To the Awakened India", 118
Trichur, 64
Trigunatitananda, Swami (Sarada), 49, *See also* Sarada
Triplicane Literary Society, 104
Trivandrum, 64, 65
Truth, 92, 218, 219
Tulsi, 223
Turiyananda, Swami (Hari), 49, 74-75, 126, 128, 166 (*See also* Hari); on Vivekananda, 74,75
Tyagi, 169

Udbodhana, 186, 197
Uma, 120
Uma-Shiva, 115
United States, 246
Unity, a journal, 126
Universal Reality (or Para Brahman), 10, 16, 26, 28, 33, 97, 119, 141, 148, 149, 150, 154, 162, 193, 230
Universal *Guru*, 53
Universal Reason, 18
Universal Soul, 55
Untouchability, 241 ; Untouchables 118, 220, 221, 241, 247
Upanishads, 4, 5, 55, 57, 68, 86, 99, 109, 113, 118, 141, 142, 145, 161, 177, 181, 199; seers, 26

Vaidyanath, 54, 122
Vaisheshika, 48
Vaishnav Bhakti, 41
Vaishnavas, 31
Vaishnavism, 31, 50
Vaishnavite devotional practices, 5
Vaishya(s), 196, 197, 198
Vamachara practices of tantras, 105
Vancouver, 75
Varanasi, 52, 53, 54, 131
(*The*) *Variety of Religious Experience*, by William James, 97
Vedanta, 16, 32, 44, 48, 57, 59, 60, 72, 83, 84, 86, 91, 92, 93, 94, 96, 99, 103, 105, 106, 107, 109, 111, 113, 117, 122, 126, 128, 141-2, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 161, 162, 165, 166, 167, 175, 176, 182, 184, 186, 193, 199, 212, 236, 237, 238, 239, 240, 241, 246, 249, 250; dualist, 149, 150, gospel, 64 ; Hindu (Hinduism) concept, 41, 199 ; Ideas, 108 ; literature 52 ; philosophy, 6, 16, 71, 126 ; Practical *Vedanta*, 165, 166, 226, 230, 236, 237, 238, 246, 247, 250 ; religion, 20 ; tenet, 25-26 ; truth, 20, 50 ; "Vedanta in All its Phases, 105; "Vedanta in relation to practical life", 104 ; Vedanta Sutras 99, 153 ; Vedantic Society of New York, 96, 125 ; Vedantic scriptures 109 ; Vedantic socialism, 165-200, 237, 251 ; *Vedantin (s)*, 113, 117, 145, 148 ; *Vedantism*, 113 ; *Vedantists*, 97, 176

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Vedas 5, 57, 61, 64, 68, 87, 91, 103, 129, 136, 141, 145, 147, 161, 174, 177, 199, 250 ; *Rig Veda*, 59, 71 :
Vedic : literature, 4 ; time, 177
Veraval, 61
Verne, Jules, 63
Vidyasagar, Pandit Ishwar Chandra, 6, 13, 115 ; Metropolitan Institution, 13
Vienna, 129
Viharas, 248
Vijnanananda, Swami (Hari Prasanna), 49 *See also* Hari Prasanna
Vimalananda, Swami, 224
Vindhya range, 17
Vinoba Bhave, Acharya, 243, 250
Vipra, 59
Viraja Homa, 124
Virat, 171
Vishishtadwaita, 30
Vishishtadwaitins, 145
Viswanath, father of Vivekananda, 8; death of, 8
Vivekananda, Swami (b : 7 ; d : 134, 135-36) :
"A Universal Religion" spoke on, in London, 97 ; account of his stay at Kanyakumari, 65-68 ; account of Vivekananda Rock, 65-68 ; address at Parliament of Religions, Chicago, extracts, 77, 78-80 ; address on *Sanyasa*, 124 ; addresses presented to him on his return from abroad, 104; and Sri Ramakrishna, 20-46; Annie Besant, on, 204 ; assessment of personality of, 203-221 ; assumed the name of Swami Vivekaannda, 45-46, 49, 74; became one of the original members of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, 18 ; became General President of Ramakrishna Mission, 109 ; began to suffer from asthma 22, birth of 7,—place of. 7 ; Brijendranath Seal on, 15, 207 ; "Buddha's Message to the world", spoke on, 126 ; Builder of Modern India, 235-251; came under the influence of Brahmo Samaj, 18 ; chair in Sanskrit in Columbia University, offered to 96 ; Chair of Eastern Philosophy in Harvard Universty,. offered to, 96 ; "Christ's Message to the World", spoke on, 126 ; Christine Green Stidel (Sister Christine), on, 88-89 ; death of, 134, 135-36, 137 ; disciples of, in America, 85- 86 ; early life of, 8-9 ; education of 11, 13-15, 34 ; "Education" lecture on, in London, 98 ; effort to clear the wrong ideas about India, its people and Hinduism during his visit to America to attend Parliamnet of Religions, 78-80, 81 *See also* lecture tour of America ; Ella Wheeler Wilcox, on, 95, 205 ; English disciples of, in England, 99 ; explained Sanskrit classies to his brother monks, 56 ; family life of, after his father's death, 33-37 ; father of, 33-34, death of 8, 33 ; fellow disciples of, 47-51 ; first step in his quest for God. description of, 17-99 ; grand-father of, 8; great

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grand-father, 7-8; heard of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, 14; Helen Huntington, on, 95; Hinduism (Hindu religion) at the time of, 2-4; illness of, growing of, 134; impression of economic condition of India on, 7; impression of Japanese people on, 75; in America, after returning from England, 94-97; incidents during his stay at Alwar, 57-59; Indian society, state of, at the time of, 1—7; 'Inspired Talks', a book on, by Miss Waldo, 89; "Is *Vedanta* Philosophy the Future Religion", spoke on, 126; J.H. Wright, on, 76; Jogesh Chandra Dutta on, 117-18; K. Vyasa Rao on, 71; "Krishna's Messages to the World", spoke on, 126; last meeting with Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, 45; lecture in California, 177; lecture in Prince's Hall, Piccadilly, England, 92-93; lecture on 'My Mission to the West' at Mahboob college, Hyderabad, 72; lecture to students of Harvard University, 95-96; lecture tour of America during his visit to attend Parliament of Religions, 81-92, 94-96; lectures at Congress of the History of Religions, 129; lectures at Vedantic Society, New York on his second visit, 125; lectures in London, 97; lectures in San Franscisco, 126; lectures on *Vedanta* Philosophy in Los Angeles on his second visit, 125-26; left Calcutta for West, again, 125.; left for India at Naples, 102; left London, 100; left New York (America) for London, 97; letters: calling himself a *tyagi*, 169, from Chicago to an Indian friend, 167-168, from Chicago, 167-68, 187-88, from Darjeeling, 169, to a Bengali disciple 177, to a friend in Madras, 168-69, to an Indian who wanted to become a monk, 169, to Francis Leggett, 98, to Marie Halboister, 211, to Miss Josephine Macleod 225, 228-29, to Mary Hale, 210-11, 213, 214, 228, to Miss Noble, 223-24, to Mrs Ole Bull, 228; to Sister Christine, 229, to Swami Brahmananda, 225, to Westerners 212-13; Mary C. Funke (Mrs) on, 204-205; Mary Hale, on, 208; meeting(s): with Alasinga Perumal, 75, with Aswini Babu, 118, with Bhaskara Setupati, 65, with Dr. Lewis G. James, 84, with Guru Charan Laskar, 57, with Maharaja Krishna Bahadur, 72, with Maharaja of Kashmir in Jammu, 112-13, with Maharaja of Khetri, 60-61, 73-74, with Maharaja Shiv Raj Bahadur, 72, with Manmatha Nath Bhattacharya, 70, with Miss Kate Sanborn, 76, with Mrs George W. Hale, 77, with Nawab Bahadur Khurshid Jah, 72, with

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Pavhari Baba of Ghazipur, 53, with Prof. Max Muller, 98, with Paul Deussen, 99, with Prof. Sundararama, 64, with Prof. William James, 96-97, with Raja of Ramnad, 103, with Sri Ramakrishna Parmahamsa first, 15, 19, 20 last, 45, with Sardar Hari Singh at Jaipur, 59, with Sir Ashman Jah, 72, with Sir K. Seshadri Iyer, 63-64, with Sir Chamarajendra Wadiyar, 63-64, with Swami Brahmananda, 74, with Swami Saradananda in London, 97, with Swami Turiyananda, 74; "Modern India" Bengali article of, 186; "My Life and Mission", spoke on, in California, 250; "My Master Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa", a lecture by, in America, 94; "My Plan of Campaign", spoke on, 104, 170, 195, 199, 248; *New York Herald*, on, 80; "Notes of some Wanderings with Swami Vivekananda" by Sister Nivedita, 114; On: *Bhakti Yoga*, 151, Christian missions in India, 81-82, education, 179, 181-83 184, 241-42, 243, efficient working of organisations, 189, function of teacher, 182-183, future of India, 171, health 180-81, idol worship, 58-59, jealousy, 187-88, national character, 189, religion, 175, role of *guru*, 151-52, Sri Ramakrishna, 86, 110-11, use of donations, 221-22, women, 177-78; Original name of, 7; *Phrenological journal* of New York, on 206-7; Practical *Vedanta*, of, 165, 166, 251; praise of his Services in America and letter to him by Indians in India, extract, 83; presided a social conference of Indian residents in Great Britain and Ireland, 98; *Puranic* concept of, 116; reading spree of, 15; reached London from America, Second time, 97; receptions to, on his return from abroad, 102; received a gift of 1600 acres of land for the establishment of a retreat for the students of *Vedanta* in California, 126; return to India from Second visit to abroad, 129; S.E. Waldo (Miss) on, 87-88, 205-6; S. K. Nair on, 64; sailed for America to attend Parliament of Religions, 49, 75; saled for London from New York, 92; Sister Christine on, 89-90; Sister Nivedita on, 121, 135; "Some Aspects to My Work in India", spoke on, 104; started teaching meditation in America, 85; stay in London, (England) 92-93, 97-99-again 125; Sturdy (Mr) on, 93; Swami Sadananda on, 48; Swami Saradananda on, 98; talk by, of the life of Jesus Christ, 47; taught the main teachings of *Upanishads* to monks, 55; takes *Vedanta* abroad, 69-100; teaching and training his fellow monks in

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Vedantic literature and sacred books of the Hindus, 52; teaching his disciples the ideals and practice of the monastic life, 122-24; teachings of, on religion, 141-164; teachings of, on Vedantic socialism, 165-200; "The East and the West" lectures on, of, 82; "The Future of India", spoke on, 104; "The Hindus and their Needs", spoke on, in England, 98; "The Necessity of Religion", spoke on, in London, 97; "The Practical Vedanta" four lectures on, by, in London, 99; "The Real and the Apparent Man", spoke on, in London, 97; "The Religion of Arabia and Mohammed the Prophet", spoke on, 126; "The Sages of India", spoke on, 104; *tirthas (yatras) See* Wanderings; "Vedanta in All its Phases", spoke on, 105; 'Vedanta in relation to Practical Life", spoke on, 104; views, on religion, 118; visit to America, again, 124; visit to Europe, 99; visit to Kiel, 99; visit to Percy, New Haven, 86; visit to Switzerland, 99; Vivekananda Rock-account of, 65-68; Vyasa Rao, K, on, 71; wanderings of, 52-68, 69-75, 119, 120-21, 131-32, after return from abroad, 104-118, 125-29; writing to Hale Sisters, 208; wrote from London to his Madras followers, 100; wrote to a friend at Thousand Island Park, America, extract, 90
Vivjananda, Swami, 107
Vox populi, 218
Vyasa, 86
Vyasa Sutras, 145

Wadhwan, 61
Wadiyar, Sri Chamarajendra, 63
Waldo, Miss S.E, 85, 87. 94; 'Inspired Talks', a book by, 89; on Vivekananda's stay in America, extract, 87-88, 205-6
Washington, 163
Weller, Sam, 212
Westminster Gazette, a journal, 93
Widow remarriage, 6
Wilberforce, William, on Hindu religion, 2
Wilcox, Ella Wheeler, on Vivekananda, 95, 205
Wimbledon, 125
Women: emanicipation of, 18; Vivekananda on, 177-178, 244
Woolley, Mr. 213
Wordsworth, 16, 19
Worship, Hindu Concept of, 159 ; Mother worship, 57 *See also* Idol worship
Wright, Prof J. H, 76, 85
Wymen, Prof, 85

Yoga(s), 16, 48, 53, 71, 136, 147, 148, 150, 156, 158, 224, 246; *Bhakti yoga*, 97, 126, 145, 151, 153, 154, 155, 156, 158, 162, 216; *Jnana yoga*, 85, 97, 145, 150, 154, 156, 158, 162, 166; *Karma yoga*, 10, 94, 145, 156, 159, 160, 162, 163,

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166; practices, 216; *Raja yoga*, 85, 94, 100, 126, 150, 156, 162
Yogananda (Dr. Street), 94-95
Yogananda Swami (Yogen), 42, 47, 49, 53 109, 215
Yogen *See* Yogananda, Swami
Yokohama, 75

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